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THESIS

LEARNING FROM OUR PAST: HOW A VIETNAM-ERA PACIFICATION PROGRAM CAN HELP US WIN IN AFGHANISTAN

by

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September 2009

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Weak, failing, failed and post-conflict states pose one of the greatest national and international security challenges of our day. The stabilization and development of faltering states is in both the short- and long-term interests of the United States because stable states pose fewer security challenges. Afghanistan is a failed state that presents security challenges on a global scale as well as a classic case study on insurgency that needs a strong counterinsurgency response.

A successful counterinsurgency needs an explicit strategy for winning the trust and confidence of the local population. Ultimately, the biggest problem is recognizing the importance of human terrain and understanding the population. Currently, operations in Afghanistan are managed at the provincial level. Only operations pushed down to the district and village level can capture these intricacies. This is where and how lessons from the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) program used in Vietnam apply.

CORDS combined the previously separate civilian and military pacification efforts in Vietnam into one program and resulted in what may have been the only truly integrated civilian-military command in U.S. history.

This thesis will assess the lessons learned from fighting a counterinsurgency in Vietnam via CORDS and how they apply in Afghanistan.

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis will assess the lessons learned from fighting a counterinsurgency in Vietnam via CORDS and how they apply in Afghanistan.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AAR	After Action Report
ADCON	Administrative Control
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANDS	Afghan National Development Strategy
ANP	Afghan National Police
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
ASOP	Afghanistan Social Outreach Program
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
COIN	Counterinsurgency
COMUSMACV	Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
CORDS	Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support
DEPCORDS	Deputy, Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support
DFAC	Dining Facility
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
DoD	Department of Defense
DOS	Department of State
DST	District Support Team
ESC	Executive Steering Committee
FOB	Forward Operating Base
FM	Field Manual
GIRoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
GVN	South Vietnamese Government
HES	Hamlet Evaluation System
IDLG	Independent Directorate of Local Governance
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
IW	Irregular Warfare
JCP	Joint Campaign Plan
JP	Joint Publication
JUSPAO	Joint United States Public Affairs Office
MACV	Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
MAT	Mobile Advisory Teams
MDG	Millennium Development Goals

NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental Organizations
NSAM	National Security Action Memorandum
NIE	National Intelligence Estimate
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
OPCON	Operational Control
PDP	Provincial Development Plans
PF	Popular Forces
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Teams
PRU	Provincial Reconnaissance Units
PSDF	People's Self-Defense Force
PSP	Provincial Strategic Plans
RD	Revolutionary Development
RF	Regional Forces
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
TACON	Tactical Control
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USIA	U.S. Information Agency
VC	Viet Cong
VCI	Viet Cong Infrastructure

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. THESIS RELEVANCE

Weak, fragile, failing, failed, collapsed, or post-conflict—no matter which term is currently en vogue to describe them, one truism remains constant: These states pose one of the greatest national and international security challenges of our day. The problems these weak states create for the rest of the world are vast: "terrorism, weapons proliferation, organized crime, infectious disease, environmental degradation, and civil conflicts that spill over borders."[1] Stabilizing and developing (or reconstructing) failed states are in the short- and long-term interest of the United States (U.S.) because these states pose a threat to national interests and to the stability of entire regions.

Afghanistan is a classic example of a failed state that presents security challenges on a global scale. Fourteen years ago, Barnett Rubin wrote, "the continued turmoil in Afghanistan has already contributed to the civil war in Tajikistan, to authoritarianism in Uzbekistan, to growing Russian aggressiveness prompted by fear of Islam along Russia's southern frontier, and to the dissemination of military skills to radical Islamists in South Asia and the Arab world."[2] Unfortunately, the story for Afghanistan has not changed much through the years. Afghanistan currently ranks seventh on the 2009 "Failed State Index,"[3] second on the 2008 "Index of State Weakness,"[4] and 174 out of 178 countries on the United Nations' 2005 Human Development Index.[5]

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[1] Susan E. Rice and Stewart Patrick, *Index of State Weakness in the Developing World* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2008), 3.

[2] Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 280.

[3] The Fund for Peace, "2009 Failed State Index," http://www.fundforpeace.org (accessed August 20, 2009).

[4] Rice and Patrick, *Index of State Weakness in the Developing World*.

[5] The UN has not been able to collect data in Afghanistan for a HDI assessment after 2005 due to the country's poor security environment. UNDP, *Afghanistan Human Development Report 2007* (Islamabad: Army Press, 2007), 3.

In 2009, U.S. President Barak Obama stated the greatest threat to U.S. security is the resurgence of al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan and has placed Afghanistan at the forefront of U.S. foreign policy.[6] More troops, more aid workers, and more funding are all part of the U.S. plan to stabilize Afghanistan. However, to win in Afghanistan entails much more than just fighting and defeating the Taliban. U.S. leaders now understand military success is not sufficient to win.[7] Secretary of Defense Robert Gates stated in November 2007 that it will take "economic development, institution-building and the rule of law, promoting internal reconciliation, good governance, providing basic services to the people, training and equipping indigenous military and police forces, strategic communications, and more—these, along with security, are essential ingredients for long-term success."[8]

How does the international community define success in Afghanistan? The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) issued its "strategic vision" for Afghanistan in April 2008. Its objectives: "extremism and terrorism will no longer pose a threat to stability, Afghan National Security Forces will be in the lead and self-sufficient, and the Afghan National Government will be able to extend the reach of good governance, reconstruction, and development throughout the country to the benefit of all its citizens."[9]

This thesis proposes there is already a blueprint from our past for the international community to use to achieve success and win in Afghanistan. This thesis will assess the lessons learned from fighting a counterinsurgency (COIN) in Vietnam. More specifically, it will assess the relevance of the lessons from the Vietnam-era Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) program, (arguably the only truly integrated civilian-military program in U.S. history,) and if and how they can be applied in Afghanistan.

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[6] The White House, "U.S. Foreign Policy Agenda," http://www.whitehouse.gov/agenda/foreign_policy/ (accessed January 27, 2009).

[7] Michael E. O'Hanlon, "Building a Basis for Success in Afghanistan," *Brookings* (July 1, 2009), http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2009/0701_afghanistan_ohanlon.aspx?p=1 (accessed August 3, 2009).

[8] Robert M. Gates, "Landon Lecture, (Kansas State University)," November 26, 2007, http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1199 (accessed April 23, 2009).

[9] ISAF's Strategic Vision, http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2008/p08-052e.html (accessed August 8, 2009).

B. IMPORTANCE

> When Allah had made the rest of the world, He saw that there was a lot of rubbish left over, bits and pieces and things that did not fit anywhere else. He collected them all together and threw them down on to the earth. That was Afghanistan.
>
> Afghan Mujahed[10]

Afghanistan is arguably one of the few places in the world where its geography has greatly impacted its history, politics and people.[11] Many have tried to conquer this rugged land (i.e., Alexander the Great and Genghis Khan) and many have failed. Afghan history is marred with conflict, from internal civil wars between the various tribes and ethnic groups to wars against large empires (British and Soviets.) Afghanistan is slightly smaller than the state of Texas, is landlocked and has a terrain that is rugged, arid, and deserted. The massive Hindu Kush mountain range splits the country in two and separates the North from the South. However, interlopers have long had an interest in the area, primarily because of its geo-strategic position relative to trade and migration routes. It truly is where the East meets the West and it has been labeled the center of the world.[12]

The Afghan people are just as rugged and diverse as its terrain. The vast majority of Afghanistan's 33.6 million[13] people are located in the rural areas, their livelihoods are largely based in agriculture, and the majority of the adult population is uneducated and illiterate. Due to decades of war, the country lacks any real infrastructure and modern development. There are seven main ethno-linguistic groups in Afghanistan, with the majority being Pashtun, two official languages (Dari and Pashto), over 30 minor languages and a multitude of dialects. To add to the complexity, Afghans, especially

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[10] Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 7.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Population data is a July 2009 estimate from the CIA World Factbook Web site, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html (accessed August 20, 2009).

Pashtuns, have historically been a tribal society, putting their trust and faith in Islam instead of their government. Pashtuns are used to living their lives in accordance with *Pashtunwali* and solving problems at their own level through their own means.[14]

David Edwards suggests we need to delve deeper below what appears on the surface to really understand Afghanistan, its people and all of its complexities. He writes:

> Afghanistan's central problem was Afghanistan itself, specifically certain profound moral contradictions that have inhibited the country from forging a coherent civil society. These contradictions are deeply rooted in Afghan culture, but they have come to the fore in the last one hundred years, since the advent of the nation-state, the laying down of permanent borders, and the attempt to establish an extensive state bureaucracy and to invest that bureaucracy with novel forms of authority and control.[15]

The aforementioned dynamics seem to suggest that it is in the best interest of the entire international community to stabilize Afghanistan and provide an avenue for the Afghan people to take control of their country and their lives, but it has to be on Afghan terms. Currently, the situation in Afghanistan is precarious: U.S. and coalition forces have been in-country since late 2001, the border region between Pakistan and Afghanistan is tumultuous and still a safe haven for terrorists, and the Taliban has gained a considerable amount of strength, especially in the South and East. In fact, top U.S. leaders have recently said the U.S. is "not winning" in Afghanistan.[16] Afghan's have

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[14] *Pashtunwali* is an unwritten, but universally understood, social code for the Pashtun people. For more information on the concept of *Pashtunwali,* see: Thomas J. Barfield, "Weapons of the not so Weak in Afghanistan: Pashtun Agrarian Structure and Tribal Organization for Times of War & Peace," paper presented at the Agrarian Studies Colloquium Series "Hinterlands, Frontiers, Cities and States: Transactions and Identities, Yale University, February 23, 2007; Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, "No Sign until the Burst of Fire: Understanding the Pakistan-Afghanistan Frontier," *International Security* 32, no. 4 (Spring 2008): 58–64.

[15] David B. Edwards, *Heroes of the Ages: Moral Fault Lines on the Afghan Frontier* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 216.

[16] For U.S. President Barak Obama's statement see: Helene Cooper and Sheryl Gay Stolberg, "Obama Ponders Outreach to Elements of the Taliban," *New York Times*, March 8, 2009, A1. For COMISAF, General David McKiernan's statement, see: "Forces 'not winning' in Afghanistan," *The Evening Standard* (March 9, 2009), http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/standard/article-23659425-details/Forces+%27+in+Afghanistan/article.do (accessed August 21, 2009); For the U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen's statement, see: "Top U.S. Advisor 'not convinced we're winning' in Afghanistan," *AFP* (September 10, 2008), http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5jBUdWbynAQ1qeP_bONUaVdcJykkg (accessed August 21, 2009).

been supportive of the Americans, but their patience is wearing thin. Strategy has to focus efforts on providing tangible results that impact the daily lives of the average Afghan at the local level. The Afghan people also need a secure environment to operate in before they can truly begin to take control and rebuild their lives.

In his speech announcing the new, comprehensive strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan in March 2009, President Obama said if the Taliban gained control of the Afghan government, the country would again be a base for al Qaeda and other terrorists. The clear and focused goal is "to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future."[17]

Afghanistan's ills are not something that can or will be improved by the intervention of foreign, conventional military forces or through massive fire power and advanced weaponry. Rather, Afghanistan represents a classic case study on a "hybrid" insurgency that needs to be met with a strong COIN strategy.[18]

C.   PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESIS

While the specific questions raised by this thesis will relate to the relevance of CORDS to COIN in Afghanistan, a series of ancillary questions will also be raised. Is our military, and more importantly, is our nation prepared for the type of challenges that are posed by a "hybrid" insurgency in Afghanistan? What is the optimal composition of force structure for COIN in Afghanistan? What is the relative role of foreign security forces versus indigenous, Afghan security forces? More specifically, what is the role of U.S., International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and NATO forces versus the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), mainly the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP)? What is the right mix of kinetic and non-kinetic power in a COIN? Probably the most important question of all is how important is the perceived legitimacy of a country's regime? For a COIN to be successful, the regime in

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[17] The White House, "A New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan," (March 27, 2009), http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/09/03/27/A-New-Strategy-for-Afghanistan-and-Pakistan/ (accessed August 21, 2009).

[18] Harald Havoll, *COIN Revisited: Lessons of the Classical Literature on Counterinsurgency and its Applicability to the Afghan Hybrid Insurgency*, NUPI Report, Security in Practice no. 13, 2008, 20–28.

power needs to be viewed as lawful and valid.[19] What are the implications of the elected leadership in Afghanistan under President Hamid Kharzai being viewed as illegitimate by Afghans outside of Kabul?

For a COIN to be successful there has to be an explicit strategy for winning the trust and confidence of the local population.[20] Ultimately, the biggest problem is recognizing the importance of human terrain and knowing a population's wishes, desires and fissures. Currently, operations in Afghanistan are managed at the provincial level. Only operations pushed down to the local level (i.e., district and village) can capture these intricacies. This is where and how lessons from CORDS will apply.

D. METHODS AND SOURCES

This thesis represents a comparative, historical case study of Vietnam and Afghanistan. Lessons, both positive and negative, associated with the CORDS program in the Vietnam War will be explored and applied to Afghanistan. A particular focus of this thesis will be prognostications concerning the impact a CORDS-like program would have on COIN in Afghanistan.

This study will use both primary and secondary sources concerning COIN in Afghanistan and Vietnam. A particularly useful source of data will be based on the after action reports of officers who have recently served as Provincial Reconstruction Team commanders in Afghanistan. Also, data from field research gathered by Professor Thomas H. Johnson and his team from the Naval Postgraduate School will be used to augment and support recommendations. This information will be complemented by other data gathered by international organizations, non-governmental organizations and the military.

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[19] Kalev I. Sepp, "Best Practices in Counterinsurgency," *Military Review* 85, no. 3 (May-June 2005): 9; Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, "Democracy in Afghanistan is Wishful Thinking," *The Christian Science Monitor* (August 20, 2009), http://www.csmonitor.com/2009/0820/p09s01-coop.html (accessed August 20, 2009).

[20] In the U.S., we often hear talk about "hearts and minds" programs. This thesis will argue the more correct terminology should be trust and confidence and that the "hearts and minds" concept is nonsense.

E.   THESIS OVERVIEW AND CONCLUSION

This thesis will present a historical case study of the CORDS program in Vietnam and recommend how lessons learned from that program can impact current stabilization and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter I is a basic introduction to the research question, hypothesis and its relevance. Chapter II represents a literature review of COIN in Vietnam and Afghanistan. Chapter III presents a case study of the CORDS program in Vietnam, focusing on successes and problems associated with a counterinsurgency. Chapter IV applies the lessons presented in Chapter III to the current situation in Afghanistan. Chapter V presents policy recommendations, suggested areas for further study, and the conclusion of the thesis.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter will provide the official Joint Publication definition of COIN, insurgency, and other terminology used in Stability Operations and contemplate if those definitions really capture what is happening in Afghanistan today. Within the definitions section, it will explore the various opinions on the U.S. military's role in nation-building and which government agency should best do these tasks. The chapter will then focus on COIN strategy and compare and contrast the classic COIN theorists versus the contemporary COIN supporters and determine what is actually needed in Afghanistan. A critical focus of this chapter will be examining why the population and legitimacy are so vital for a COIN's success. The chapter will conclude with an exploration of the use of conventional tactics in COIN, the role of intelligence and the need for a combined, multi-agency effort.

B. DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are from the current Joint Publication (JP) 1-02.

- *Counterinsurgency* (COIN)—those military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency

- *Insurgency*—an organized movement aimed at the overthrown of a constituted government through use of subversion and armed conflict

Does this JP definition of an insurgency accurately reflect who we are fighting in Afghanistan today? Some insurgents may have political objectives to disrupt the government and others are probably satisfied with just participating in the jihad.[21] Chris North argues a better definition to describe what we are fighting would be the broader category of conflict known as irregular warfare.[22]

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[21] David Kilcullen, "Counter-insurgency Redux," *Survival* 48 (Winter 2006-07): 115–116.

[22] Chris North, "Redefining Insurgency," *Military Review* 88, no. 1 (January/February 2008): 117.

- *Irregular warfare (IW)*—a violent struggle among states and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s). Irregular warfare favors indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capacities, in order to erode an adversary's power, influence, and will.

North suggests a more accurate definition for COIN would be "those military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government *to combat irregular warfare and promote stability operations*."[23] The following sections utilize North's recommended definition.

1.   Nation-building[24]

Michele Flournoy and Shawn Brimley write in the foreword of *The U.S. Army Stability Operations Field Manual* that the U.S. military will face three core challenges in the future: "Rising tensions in the global commons, hybrid forms of warfare, and threats posed by weak and failing states."[25] This suggests U.S. military forces need to be prepared for more than just fighting and winning conventional wars. The Field Manual indirectly proposes that U.S. policy makers need to break down and officially add nation-building skills to the U.S. military's repertoire. Francis Fukuyama points out since the end of the Cold War, the U.S. has:

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[23] North, "Redefining Insurgency," 118.

[24] The terms "nation-building" and "state-building" are often used interchangeably in literature. For the context of this thesis, "nation-building" implies the creation of political institutions and promotion of economic development, leading to a self-sustaining state capacity that can survive once foreign advice and support are withdrawn. Simon Chesterman explains "nation-building" actually has a more specific meaning in the post-colonial context, in which new leaders attempted to rally a population within sometimes arbitrary territorial frontiers. The focus for this thesis is on the state (that is, the highest institutions of governance in a territory) rather than the nation (a people who share common customs, origins, history, and frequently language.) Simon Chesterman, *You, the People: The United Nations, Transitional Administration, and State-Building*, Final Report, International Peace Academy, November 2003, 13.

[25] Michele Flournoy and Shawn Brimley, "Stability Operations in a Changing Strategic Context," foreword to *The U.S. Army Stability Operations Field Manual* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), vii.

> Taken on roughly one new nation-building commitment every other year…We have been in denial about it, but we are in this business for the long haul. We'd better get used to it, and learn how to do it—because there will almost certainly be a next time.[26]

U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates concurs. He has stated, "Our future conflicts are likely to look like the current ones, it is high time we stopped muddling through and got serious about learning how to operate in environments other than conventional high tech peer-to-peer combat."[27]

Nation-building (or state-building) skills are normally considered as belonging to civilian institutions (i.e., Department of State (DOS), U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), etc.) U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has explicitly highlighted development as "an equal partner, along with defense and diplomacy," in advancing U.S. national security.[28] However, the reality is the U.S. military fills the development gap since U.S. civilian agencies do not have anywhere near the capacity needed to conduct state-building tasks in post-conflict environments and other stabilization and reconstruction situations.

The counter-argument is the U.S. Army is currently too focused on COIN and realistically, our future conflicts (i.e., Iran or North Korea) will not involve the need for "winning hearts and minds," but a reliance on conventional tactics.[29] Moreover, for a COIN to be successful, it involves a "wholesale societal transformation" which is not something that necessarily serves the national interests of the U.S., especially when it involves the military.[30] The U.S. just needs to stay out of situations where COIN is the

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[26] Francis Fukuyama, "Nation-building 101," *The Atlantic Monthly* 293, no. 1 (2004): 159.

[27] Janine Davidson, "Next Generation Doctrine," *Introduction to the U.S. Army Stability Operations Field Manual* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), xii.

[28] Hillary Clinton, "Address to the U.S. Agency for International Development," *USAID* (January 23, 2009), http://www.usaid.gov/press/speeches/2009/sp090123.html (accessed April 23, 2009).

[29] Gian P. Gentile, "A (Slightly) Better War: A Narrative and Its Defects," *World Affairs* 171 (Summer 2008): 57–64.

[30] Andrew J. Bacevich, "Raising Jihad," *National Interest Online* (March 2, 2009), http://www.nationalinterest.org/Article.aspx?id=20932 (accessed August 24, 2009); Steven Metz, "Trends, Threats, and Expectations," *Small Wars Journal* (March 20, 2009), http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/2009/03/trends-theats-and-expectations/ (accessed August 24, 2009).

main strategy and let someone else take the lead. After all, the role of the U.S. Army is to fight and win the nation's wars, not win hearts and minds. Moreover, when democracies adopt a nation-building strategy, it actually creates more targets, incentives and opportunities for terrorism.[31]

This counter-argument is flawed for several reasons. First, the world we live in is getting smaller and flatter.[32] Globalization and technology have made geographical borders almost irrelevant. In this highly interwoven, interdependent, global society we live in, it is in our national interest to ensure weak and failing states are stabilized before they become failed states and create further chaos in their region of the world. It is by far less costly to be engaged early, PRIOR to the need for military intervention.[33] "A safe and secure environment for people in all communities and states is an essential condition for sustainable economic, political, and social development, and conflict mitigation."[34] Moreover, our economy continues to grow and thrive when we have a variety of stable trading partners throughout the world.

Second, the best way of confronting non-state actors or multinational threats is through a confluence of "diplomatic engagement, law enforcement tactics, civilian development agencies, democracy and good governance promotion and in some cases, our armed forces."[35] Even more important than all this, we need to ensure these threats are confronted via a unified coalition, not unilaterally. More often than not, the U.S. perceives security threats in military terms and chooses to respond with force. We need

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[31] Gary T. Dempsey, "Old Folly in a New Disguise: Nation Building to Combat Terrorism," *Cato Institute, Policy Analysis* 429 (March 21, 2002), http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa429.pdf (accessed November 19, 2008).

[32] Thomas L. Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Picador, 2007).

[33] Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, *The Challenge of Reducing the Global Incidence of Civil War* (Copenhagen Consensus Challenge Paper, Centre for the Study of African Economies, March 26, 2004), http://www.uib.es/depart/deaweb/smed/pdf/collier.pdf (accessed August 25, 2009).

[34] Nicole J. Ball, "Strengthening Democratic Governance of the Security Sector in Conflict Affected Countries," *Public Administration and Development* 25 (Winter 2005): 25.

[35] Michael Cohen, "The Future of the U.S. Military," *Democracy Arsenal* (March 23, 2009), http://www.democracyarsenal.org/2009/03/the-future-of-the-us-military.html (accessed August 24, 2009).

to develop our civilian development capacity so that the military is not the primary tool in our kit for confronting security challenges. Moreover, the military should not be the lead agent in post-conflict reconstruction efforts.[36]

Stabilization and reconstruction is an evolving concept that is most commonly considered as the "intersection of military-led stability operations and civilian-led reconstruction activities...Reconstruction activities include all aspects of improving governance: training civil administrators, improving essential services and public safety, supporting civil society and self-determination, and promoting the rule of law and economic development."[37] JP 01-2 defines stability operations as "an overarching term encompassing various military missions, tasks, and activities conducted outside the United States in coordination with other instruments of national power to maintain or reestablish a safe and secure environment, provide essential government services, emergency infrastructure reconstruction, and humanitarian relief."[38]

To summarize, according to the JP definitions, we are engaged in IW in Afghanistan. The key words in the IW definition that need to be highlighted are legitimacy and the population. Furthermore, COIN is a combination of offensive, defensive and stability operations.[39] Stability operations include skills outside of conventional tactics and rely on strong relationships with civilian development agencies. As stated earlier, development equates to nation-building. Therefore, if the U.S. is going to employ a solid COIN strategy, we must have a paradigm shift from conventional priorities and its emphasis on massive weapons systems to enhancing capabilities for stability operations.

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[36] John J. Hamre and Gordon R. Sullivan, "Toward Postconflict Reconstruction," *The Washington Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (Autumn 2002): 90.

[37] Michael J. McNerney, "Stabilization and Reconstruction in Afghanistan: Are PRTs a Model or a Muddle?," *Parameters* 35, no. 4 (Winter 2005/2006): 34.

[38] *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Joint Publication 1-02 (as amended through March 17, 2009), 517.

[39] United States Department of the Army, *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 35.

C. COIN STRATEGY: CLASSIC VS CONTEMPORARY

The central argument of this thesis is that the Vietnam CORDS model has lessons and implications for Afghanistan's COIN strategy. Military historian Andrew Birtle suggests, "the best preparation officers can have for … duty, barring personal experience, is to study previous historical situations to sensitize themselves to the kinds of dilemmas that counter-guerrilla, civil affairs, and contingency operations typically pose."[40]

However, which previous historical situations should we be studying? The classicists focus on revolutionary warfare from the 1950s and 1960s and the key theorists include David Galula, Robert Thompson, Bernard Fall, and Frank Kitson. They all propose a common set of key principles and practices that have emerged over time. Frank Hoffman minimizes these classical principles as mere "blatant flashes of the obvious, such as Robert Thompson's somber advice "the government must have an overall plan.""[41] Nevertheless, if it were so easy and obvious, then why are we eight years into Afghanistan and still "not winning?" Inject Clausewitz' maxim: "Everything in strategy is very simple, but that does not mean that everything is very easy."[42] Still, others argue we would be better off focusing on internal conflicts from the 1990s (i.e., Somalia, Sri Lanka, Columbia, Bosnia, Congo, and Kosovo) since these provide a more realistic insight into current insurgencies.[43]

Historically, most rural-based insurgencies have started with a large peasant population and are fueled by a Maoist or Marxist-Leninist ideology.[44] When the extreme

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[40] Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860-1921* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2001), 280.

[41] Frank G. Hoffman, "Neo-Classical Counterinsurgency," *Parameters* (Summer 2007): 71–72.

[42] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 178.

[43] Kilcullen, "Counter-insurgency Redux," 111–112; Steven Metz, "New Challenges and Old Concepts: Understanding 21st Century Insurgency," *Parameters* (Winter 2007/2008): 22.

[44] For examples, see Gordon H. McCormick, "The Shining Path and Peruvian Terrorism," ed. David C. Rapoport, *Inside Terrorist Organizations* (London: Frank Cass, 2001); James J. Brittain, "The FARC-EP in Columbia: A Revolutionary Exception in an Age of Imperialist Expansion," *Monthly Review* 57, no. 4 (September 2005): 20.

ideology is religious-based, it adds another dimension to its complexity.[45]   Is it even possible to devise a strategy to fight a group whose logic and rationality is rooted in religion? Unfortunately, the role of religion is glossed over in the current COIN Field Manual (FM). It seems U.S. policy makers have yet to embrace Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* theory: Conflicts will no longer be primarily ideological or economic, but rather along cultural lines, specifically between Christianity and Islam.[46]   Instead, the U.S. is often more aligned with Fukuyama's *End of History* theory, assuming free market economies and liberal democracies will universally be accepted if just given the chance.[47] Graham Fuller paints a more realistic picture with his statement: "Muslims firmly believe that the present meltdown of international financial order vindicates their belief that Western focus upon market efficiency, market freedom, and minimalization of market controls is precisely what the Islamic order fears."[48]   A *jihadist* that is willing to blow himself up for the reward of martyrdom is probably not going to be won over by a government-sponsored reconstruction program.

The U.S. Army's own COIN FM seems conflicted between classical theory and contemporary lessons. The second paragraph in the foreword reads:

> You cannot fight former Saddamists and Islamic extremists the same way you would have fought the Viet Cong, Moros, or Tupamaros: the application of principles and fundamentals to deal with each varies considerably. Nonetheless, all insurgencies, even today's highly adaptable strains, remain wars amongst the people. They use variations of standard themes and adhere to elements of a recognizable revolutionary campaign plan.[49]

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[45] Frank G. Hoffman, "Neo-Classical Counterinsurgency," *Parameters* (Summer 2007): 77–78; Lee Harris, "Al Qaeda's Fantasy Ideology," *Policy Review* 114 (2002); T. X. Hammes, "Fourth Generation Warfare Evolves, FIFTH EMERGES," *Military Review* 87, no. 3 (May/June 2007): 16–17.

[46] Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations," *Foreign Affairs* 72 (Summer 1993).

[47] Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?," *The National Interest* 16 (Summer 1989).

[48] Graham E. Fuller, "A Global Convergence Against Globalization?," *New Perspectives Quarterly* 26 (Summer 2009): http://www.digitalnpq.org/archive/2009_summer/06_fuller.html (accessed August 25, 2009).

[49] Petraeus and Amos, "Foreword," in the United States Department of the Army, *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, xlv.

Throughout the entire FM, there are examples of melding the traditional approaches with the realities of globalization and religious extremism. It is this merger of the past and the present that could be categorized as "neo-classical counterinsurgency."[50] Simply put, we need to use classical COIN principles, but we need to adapt them to the realities of the current situation. Specific to Afghanistan, Harald Havoll proposes there are elements of a classical insurgency, but only to a certain extent. Afghanistan's insurgency is more evolved and complex and Havoll refers to it as a "hybrid insurgency."[51]

It is true that today's insurgencies differ significantly from those of the 1960s. Today's insurgents are not always necessarily seeking to overthrow a state and instead of Marxist-Leninist ideals, they use religious extremism as their recruiting platform. Afghanistan is even more complex because there are multiple insurgencies competing within the state. However, even with all this, it still comes down to one critical element: the population. The population always has been and always will be the center of gravity. So, no matter what label we put on the insurgency—classic, contemporary, religious, neo-classical, or hybrid—the key to success is ultimately controlling the population.

1.   Population is the Center of Gravity

All COIN literature agrees the population is the key and gaining control over it is the center of gravity for both the insurgent and the counterinsurgent. To be clear, this concept is about much more than just gaining the support of the population because this is by no means a popularity contest. What people think and what people do are two totally different things. The population may like the counterinsurgent (i.e., government, coalition forces, etc.), but they will not support the counterinsurgent due to lack of control over the political space.[52]

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[50] Hoffman, "Neo-Classical Counterinsurgency," 72–73.

[51] Havoll, *COIN Revisited: Lessons of the Classical Literature on Counterinsurgency and its Applicability to the Afghan Hybrid Insurgency*, 23.

[52] For an example of how the Viet Cong controlled the administrative political space in Vietnam, see Bernard B. Fall, "The Theory and Practice of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency," *Naval War College Review* (Winter 1998).

The only thing that makes it possible for insurgents to survive and expand is the participation of the population.[53]   However, participation should not be confused with sympathy. In areas where the state has proven it cannot protect its people, the population sometimes has no choice but to support the insurgent. The insurgent lives and works in the population, publically eliminates rivals, intimidates potential ones and scares the rest of the population into being quiet. The insurgent does not need the "support, sympathy, or loyalty of the people, not even a significant minority" of the population for them to be able to operate.[54] They can operate and succeed with only 2% of the population actively supporting them, as long as the other 98% is passive.[55]

Gaining the population's trust and confidence is first step towards control. The phrase heard most often to describe this in COIN is "hearts and minds."[56] Dr. David Kilcullen, one of the world's experts on guerilla warfare who has helped revamp the U.S. military strategy in Afghanistan, describes "hearts" as persuading people that their interests are served by your success and describes "minds" as convincing them that you can protect them and that resisting you is pointless. Neither concept has to do anything with getting people to like you.[57] What you are really trying to do in this situation is gain the local populace's trust and confidence. When the population trusts your motives and has confidence in your ability to provide a secure environment, they will start to understand that their self-interest is best served by you and not the insurgents. Once the counterinsurgent gains the population's trust and confidence, the insurgent starts to lose

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[53] David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006), 33–34; Robert Taber, *War of the Flea: The Classic Study of Guerrilla Warfare* (Washington, DC: Brassy's, 2002), 11.

[54] Nathan Leites and Charles Wolf, Jr., *Rebellion and Authority: An Analytic Essay on Insurgent Conflicts* R-462-ARPA (Santa Monica: RAND, February 1970), 149.

[55] T. E. Lawrence, "Science of Guerrilla Warfare," in *T. E. Lawrence in War & Peace: An Anthology of the Military Writings of Lawrence of Arabia,* ed. Malcolm Brown (London: Greenhill Books, 2005), 284.

[56] Hearts and minds was actually a term first coined by U.S. President John Adams in his 1818 retrospective on the American Revolution. Sepp, "Best Practices in Counterinsurgency," 9.

[57] David J. Kilcullen, "Twenty-Eight Articles: Fundamentals of Company-level Counterinsurgency," *Military Review* (October 2006): 134.

the population's support, their support network then starts to break down, and they become more vulnerable. However, the counterinsurgent must prove as early as possible to the population they have the will, the means, and the ability to win.[58]

2.   Legitimacy

The ultimate success of COIN depends on building and securing the legitimacy of the indigenous government.[59] According to the COIN manual, the desired end state of a COIN is "establishing legitimacy and gaining popular support for the host nation government."[60] On the flipside, governments that are considered corrupt and inept by its people are ripe for take over either through rebellion or revolution.[61] This was why the South Vietnamese Government (GVN) failed once the U.S. forces left Vietnam and is currently the problem in Afghanistan today. The U.S.-backed central government of each country could not stand on its own without support.

In Vietnam, the U.S. supported bureaucrats, elites, and intellectuals and disregarded about 85% of the South Vietnamese population.[62] Once CORDS was implemented, it made progress in the rural areas, but the GVN was never able to capitalize on the progress because they were fatally out of touch with their own people.[63] CORDS was able to get corrupt GVN province chiefs removed, but the Saigon government continued to retain and even promote inept officials. Their political system was based on loyalty, not competence, and the Vietnamese people saw through this.[64] Henry Kissinger said in 1969, "We are so powerful that Hanoi is simply unable to defeat

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[58] Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice,* 55.

[59] Havoli, *COIN Revisited: Lessons of the Classical Literature on Counterinsurgency and its Applicability to the Afghan Hybrid Insurgency*, 34.

[60] *The U.S. Army Stability Operations Field Manual* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 197.

[61] Chalmers Johnson, *Revolutionary Change*, 2nd ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982).

[62] Loren Baritz, *Backfire: A History of How American Culture led us into Vietnam and Made us Fight the Way we did* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1985), 244.

[63] Jeffrey Record, *The Wrong War: Why we Lost in Vietnam* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1998), 138–139.

[64] Richard A. Hunt, *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam's Hearts and Minds* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 276–277.

us militarily. By its own efforts, Hanoi cannot force the withdrawal of American forces from South Vietnam….Unfortunately, our military strength has no political corollary; we have been unable so far to create a political structure that could survive military opposition from Hanoi after we withdraw."[65]

The current situation in Afghanistan is similar to that of Vietnam described above. Although the main goal of the insurgency in Afghanistan is not to overthrow the government, the incompetence and corruption of the central government are accelerants that fuel the fire. The Afghan people have grown disillusioned with democracy these past eight years. They saw warlords and commanders co-opted after the Bonn Agreement and continue to watch corrupt government officials get richer by lining their pockets with foreign aid that never reaches the average Afghan.[66]

The international community seems intent on turning Afghanistan into a liberal democracy without taking into account its history, culture, or traditions.[67] Roland Paris argues that peace-building as a whole is too focused on holding elections before the institutions that enable an elected government to fulfill its governance functions are in place and capable.[68] Afghanistan is a case study for this concept and the low voter turn-out for the August 2009 Presidential elections should raise red flags. The vast majority of Afghans are frustrated by the "democratization process that has brought them little but an abstract illusion. With growing suspicion about the magical power of democracy, the concept itself is increasingly challenged as a pretext for Western intervention that bears little resemblance to the idea of participation and public accountability."[69]

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[65] Henry A. Kissinger, "The Vietnam Negotiations," *Foreign Affairs* 47 (1969): 230.

[66] International Crisis Group, *Afghanistan: The Need for International Resolve*, Asia Report no. 145 (February 6, 2008): 3–4.

[67] Johnson and Mason, "Democracy in Afghanistan is Wishful Thinking," *The Christian Science Monitor*.

[68] Roland Paris, *At War's End: Building Peace after Civil Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[69] Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh and Michael Schoiswhol, "Playing with Fire? The International Community's Democratization Experiment in Afghanistan," *International Peacekeeping* 15, no. 2 (April 2008): 252–253.

Democratic mechanisms have to be adapted to the particular needs of a community, not the community to an ideal of a democratic system. Legitimacy is key to building sustainable peace, and this legitimacy comes not from the timetable of donors with blueprints of post-conflict reconstruction, but from the points of view of the population.[70]

3. Conventional Tactics

To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.

Sun Tzu[71]

Robert Komer, the first leader of the CORDS program, foreshadowed events in Afghanistan when he warned the U.S. would encounter rural insurgencies in the future and must heed the lessons of Vietnam. Firepower and high technology are not always the best way to win wars in certain areas of the world, but it is what the U.S. military is trained and equipped to do.[72] The U.S. military needs to adapt to meet the challenges of IW. However, is it possible to change the culture of an organization—"Big Army"—that prides itself on massive firepower and direct attacks?

A retired U.S. Army officer who is considered an expert in COIN, John A. Nagl, compares the U.S. and British forces and their responses to counterinsurgency in his book, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*. Nagl critiques the U.S. Army for continuing to train in conventional warfare tactics and its failure to learn from the Vietnam War where it relied too much on conventional strategy and tactics. To further cloud matters, there are still proponents to this day who believe Vietnam could have been won through the

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[70] Tadjbakhsh and Schoiswhol, "Playing with Fire? The International Community's Democratization Experiment in Afghanistan," 265.

[71] Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. and introduction by Samuel B. Griffith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 77.

[72] Todd Leventhal, "The Future of Conflict," *The Washington Quarterly* 6 (1983): 168.

application of more military power.[73] The fact is in Vietnam, the Army continued to stick with a high-cost, low-payoff strategy by ignoring the political and social dimensions that form the foundations of COIN.[74]

The difference between conventional warfare and unconventional warfare is so great, that if an army is trained to be very successful in one type of conflict, they will have a very hard time adapting to other types of conflict.[75] In fact, a counterinsurgent force actually needs capabilities much closer to the insurgent's. Nathan Leites and Charles Wolf, Jr. write: "Mobility, reconnaissance, police (rather than military) intelligence, a capacity for operating effectively in small units, and police and paramilitary forces are the important military elements for deterring or meeting the threat of insurgents—not armor, artillery, jet aircraft, and large centralized operations by large divisional units."[76] A counterinsurgent needs the ability to operate quickly, decisively and have the uncanny ability to adapt and learn throughout the campaign. A COIN is not merely a fight against an enemy's military forces and it is very different from short, intense war. The objective is not to destroy an enemy, but rather to provide security for local residents so they feel safe and secure in going about their daily lives. The only way for a COIN force to positively impact the security situation for the village and the population they are trying to protect is through accurate and timely intelligence.

4.   Role of Intelligence

Effective and efficient action in COIN requires timely and reliable information. Both the insurgent and the counterinsurgent need information to make advances. Since the insurgent lives and works among the population, they start with the information

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[73] Thomas X. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21ˢᵗ Century* (Minneapolis: Zenith Press, 2006), 56–58.

[74] Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1986), 233.

[75] John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 219.

[76] Leites and Wolf, Jr., *Rebellion and Authority: An Analytic Essay on Insurgent Conflicts*, 154.

advantage. This information advantage is even more pronounced in less-developed countries (i.e., Afghanistan.)[77] The insurgent is able to firmly establish themselves and build their base before the counterinsurgent even learns about them.

Collectively, the population has all the information the counterinsurgent needs to take the advantage. Therefore, an intelligence program that is focused more on the human and cultural terrain versus a heavy reliance on SECRET/NO FOREIGN data will be better equipped to exploit the population.[78]

Andrew Krepinevich criticizes the Army's intelligence failures in Vietnam because it never embraced the necessity to destroy the Viet Cong's political infrastructure as a precursor for victory. Army Intelligence officers did not think understanding the Vietnamese culture, language and history was important to their duties because their focus was on the enemy order of battle.[79]

Just like Vietnam, the lack of understanding Afghan culture, history and language hampers the international efforts. For example, Afghans value age and social status. This places junior officers and young civilians at a disadvantage culturally when they are out in the field.[80] Although we may not be able to age our force in the field, we can enhance their cultural knowledge base and language skills.

It is also critical to understand the social networks of an environment to determine who has the most potential influence over the insurgents. Kilcullen encourages co-opting indigenous women through targeted social and economic programs to build one's own female counterinsurgency. He states, "win the women, and you own the family unit. Own the family, and you take a big step forward in mobilizing the population."[81]

Intelligence is critical for any military operation, but intelligence supporting a COIN cannot be based on data that is found on SECRET platforms. For one, the

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[77] Leites and Wolf, Jr., *Rebellion and Authority: An Analytic Essay on Insurgent Conflicts*, 132–137.

[78] Kilcullen, "Counter-insurgency Redux," 123–124.

[79] Krepinevich, Jr., *The Army and Vietnam* 229.

[80] Robert Perito, *The U.S. Experience with Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: Lessons Identified* (United States Institute of Peace, Special Report no. 125, October 2005), 11–12.

[81] Kilcullen, "Twenty-Eight Articles: Fundamentals of Company-level Counterinsurgency," 7.

information cannot be readily shared with coalition and Afghan partners. Secondly, the information is usually not even relevant or applicable to the localized area of operations. The focus needs to be on gathering data on the local insurgent and that can only be gained from interactions with the village population.[82]

5. Combined Effort

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to COIN and every situation will require different tactics because it has to be adapted to the local situation. However, a successful COIN strategy should always put the local population first and plan on working with a multitude of agencies. Kilcullen describes counterinsurgency as "armed social work."[83] In COIN, working on social and political issues are the crux of the mission. This is where relationships with inter-agency partners and indigenous actors are crucial. The military's "role is to provide protection, identify needs, facilitate civil affairs and use improvements in social conditions as leverage to build networks and mobilize the population."[84] The ultimate goal is for the population to take the lead and start making decisions that impact their villages and families.

Further evidence of the importance of involving the local population is found in a comparative study of two towns in a post-conflict environment. Anne Holohan proposes that local populations should be "treated with greater inclusiveness and respect--as full partners--because they are truly the key to the long-term success of an intervention. Without their participation and cooperation, the efforts of the international organizations will come to nothing."[85] She also finds that, "the problem or challenge of providing security and of facilitating a democratic transition and of reconstructing the society is too big for any one hierarchical organization."[86] The bottom line is that no one agency can

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[82] Leites and Wolf, Jr., *Rebellion and Authority: An Analytic Essay on Insurgent Conflicts*, 154–155.

[83] Kilcullen, "Twenty-Eight Articles: Fundamentals of Company-level Counterinsurgency," 8.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Anne Holohan, *Networks of Democracy: Lessons from Kosovo for Afghanistan, Iraq, and Beyond* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 167.

[86] Ibid., 127.

perform complex stability operations on their own. There must be inter-agency cooperation and coordination, as well as close involvement from the local population, for there to be long-term sustainability.

A strategy of close involvement from the local population is pursued by Greg Mortenson. His organization empowers indigenous people to be fully involved in every aspect of building a school for their community. This creates a sense of ownership and pride in the project. As a result, of the 80 plus schools his organization has helped build, only one has been attacked by the Taliban. Mortenson stated in the village where the school was attacked, the people have vowed to find the individuals responsible and hold them accountable. He is a firm believer that the reason why more of the schools have not been attacked is due to the power of village consensus and the fact they have promised to protect the schools with their lives.[87]

These examples suggest in order for a COIN to succeed, there has to be a plan to work together with civilian agencies, learn what is important to the local population, get them to take ownership of their village and be willing to protect it, at all costs, against the insurgents.

D.   SUMMARY

This chapter suggests the JP definition of IW best captures what is currently taking place in Afghanistan and recommends the COIN definition be updated to include IW and stability operations. Stability operations include a wide range of skills that fall outside the scope of the U.S. military. Civilian agencies are paramount to nation-building and their capacity has to be enhanced if they are ever going to be used effectively.

Regardless of what label is put on the insurgency in Afghanistan, the U.S. needs to re-examine its counterinsurgency strategy and make building trust and confidence among the indigenous population the top priority. There is a "symbiotic relationship between the Taliban, Al Qaeda, and rural civilians" in Afghanistan and the international

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[87] Greg Mortenson (author, *Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace...One School at a Time* (NY: Penguin Books, 2007), in discussion with the author, Naval Postgraduate School, May 2009.

efforts need to be focused down to the district and village level.[88] The U.S. is making the same mistakes the Soviets did by holding the urban centers and focusing on establishing a strong, central government in Kabul. If the international community does not gain a better understanding of the nature of the conflict, we will continue to make decisions and pursue operational objectives that harbor resentment and instill fear among those in the local population that we need on our side.

This chapter points out the importance of winning the trust and confidence of the population and in order to achieve long-term success, local civilians and inter-agency groups must be incorporated into a stability operations network. Finding a way to involve the indigenous population and effectively cooperate with a multitude of civilian organizations is the path to success in Afghanistan. This thesis proposes CORDS leads us towards that passageway. From interagency cooperation and coordination to village level reconstruction efforts, while CORDS will not provide the turn-key solution for Afghanistan, it offers concepts and ideas worth exploring.

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[88] Thomas H. Johnson, "The Consequences of Siege Mentality," Complex Terrain Laboratory, http://www.terraplexic.org/ctlabsymposia/2008/9/30/the-consequences-of-siege-mentality.html (accessed November 23, 2008); Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, "All Counterinsurgency is Local," *The Atlantic Monthly* 302, no. 3 (October 2008): 36; Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, "Understanding the Taliban and Insurgency in Afghanistan," *Orbis* 51, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 71.

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III. CIVIL OPERATIONS AND REVOLUTIONARY DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter will serve mainly as a historical review of the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support[89] (CORDS) program, focusing on the time period just before and after its implementation in 1967. It will provide a background on how the U.S. viewed the threat posed by the Viet Cong (VC) prior to 1967 and the U.S. Army's approach to COIN in comparison to the overall war effort, which was based solidly in conventional strategy. The chapter will then discuss pacification and provide an explanation on what the U.S. was trying to accomplish in Vietnam with these programs. The chapter will then explore the decisions behind putting a civilian in charge of CORDS and making him a vice to the Commander, Military Assistance Command Vietnam, and the subsequent results of putting a civilian in the military chain-of-command. It will then delve into Project TAKEOFF, the action program Robert Komer implemented to kick-start CORDS on a national level. Finally, the chapter will extrapolate four macro-level lessons from CORDS that can be applied to the current effort in Afghanistan.

During the Vietnam conflict, the U.S. was essentially fighting two different wars: the first was a conventional war against the North Vietnamese forces and the second was an insurgency war against VC guerrillas in rural South Vietnam. There are countless studies and pieces of work examining the U.S.'s performance in the conventional war. This chapter focuses on "the other war" and explores why the CORDS program was the most effective counterinsurgency weapon used against the VC.

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[89] In 1970, the word "Rural" replaced "Revolutionary" to denote changed emphasis. Thomas W. Scoville, *Reorganizing for Pacification Support* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1982), v.

There were numerous pacification programs[90] attempted in Vietnam prior to CORDS. These programs were initiated and conducted by both the South Vietnamese government and the United States. Although the programs were different in name, they all had two main goals: 1) protect the rural population from the insurgents and 2) meet the rural population's needs through various aid and infrastructure support programs. The crux was to ultimately generate support for the Saigon regime. As Dale Andrade explains, "the machinery for extending pacification consisted of various small and diverse programs run by every conceivable civilian agency in South Vietnam; the effort was getting nowhere. Those involved in pacification had neither the resources nor the leverage to prompt … action."[91] More critical to their downfall than the lack of unity and coordination of effort, none of the programs could provide reliable security for the population they were trying to assist.

Just like in Afghanistan today, the insurgents did not just target military forces, but attacked "school teachers and health workers, the village chiefs and agricultural workers, the literate and those who would lead Vietnam towards social justice and modernization."[92] Life in rural Vietnam was susceptible to insecurity, poverty, low health standards, lack of opportunity, social injustice, and land inequities. The VC easily exploited the rural population's feelings of alienation from the central government.[93] The

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[90] The major programs for pacification include: *Agrovilles*, the Strategic Hamlet program, *Chieu Hoi* or "Open Arms," *Chien Thang* or "Will to Victory," *Hop Tac* or "Victory" (this foreshadowed the U.S. military's later role in pacification support), U.S. Army civil affairs mobile training teams, medical civil affairs programs (MEDCAP), county fair operations, Long Huu operation, Operation FAIRFAX/*Rang Dong*, Operation CEDAR FALLS, Office of Civil Operations, Revolutionary Development Cadre, and the USMC Combined Action Platoon (CAP) program. According to Robert Komer, Civic Action, *Agrovilles*, the Strategic Hamlet program of 1961-63, the 1964-65 *Hop Tac* campaign around Saigon, and Revolutionary Development during 1965-67 were the most prominent. Robert Komer, "Was There Another Way?," in *The Lessons of Vietnam*, ed. W. Scott Thompson and Donaldson D. Frizzell (New York: Crane, Russak & Company, 1977), 213; R. W. Komer, *Impact of Pacification on Insurgency in South Vietnam* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1970), 1-2; Hunt, *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam's Hearts and Minds,* 16–30, 45–59.

[91] Dale Andrade, *Ashes to Ashes: The Phoenix Program and the Vietnam War* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1990), 47.

[92] Robert Komer, *The Other War in Vietnam: A Progress Report* (Department of State Bulletin, publication 8151, Far Eastern Series 151, October 1966), 1.

[93] Ibid., 9.

CORDS program was a collective and coordinated attempt to provide country-wide security, eliminate VC terror and intimidation, and produce constructive change in the lives of the rural people.

B. VIET CONG ASSESSMENT PRIOR TO 1965

It is important to understand Washington's sense of the VC threat prior to sending conventional forces over in mid-1965. Before President John F. Kennedy took office in 1961, a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) published in August 1959 suggested that there would probably be no existential crisis for the foreseeable future in Vietnam. However, the reality on the ground was a very different story: the South Vietnamese President, Ngo Dinh Diem, was viewed as unpopular, the South's economy was not developing like the North's, and Diem's government was under pressure from guerrillas (VC) supported from the North. The NIE reported the North would continue to support the VC, but an "overt invasion seemed most unlikely."[94] The situation in Vietnam was "unhappy, but not unstable."[95] Even through the end of 1961, classified reports showed an increase in VC strength and activity in the Vietnamese countryside, which culminated with a failed military coup to overthrow Diem in November 1960. However, regardless of how dire the situation actually was on the ground, an optimistic view was always briefed to U.S. policymakers, even by those who personally authored the original reports![96]

President Kennedy and his administration eventually realized more action was required and in October 1961, sent a team of high-level military and civilian officials to Saigon to develop a counterinsurgency plan for South Vietnam. General Maxwell Taylor offered compelling reasons on why the U.S. should stay out of Vietnam,[97] but also suggested an increase in the number of American advisors in-country and to send several

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[94] United States Department of Defense, *The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of United States Decisionmaking on Vietnam*, The Senator Gravel ed. vol. II (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 18.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Record, *The Wrong War: Why We Lost in Vietnam*, 2.

Army battalions of engineer, signal, and medical troops with enough infantry to protect them.[98] President Kennedy agreed and believed the increase in advisors would directly improve South Vietnamese military performance and provide a new source of intelligence.[99]

After further review of the team's recommendations, President Kennedy took steps to focus U.S. government attention on pacification. The Kennedy administration wanted a national security strategy that was less about massive retaliation and provided a more flexible response, especially to threats of insurgencies. The administration viewed counterinsurgency as a way to assist allies in wars of national liberation. To move towards this more flexible U.S. security strategy, the U.S. Army needed to be proficient in counterinsurgency tactics.[100]

Unfortunately, the U.S. Army was not receptive to President Kennedy's push for a strong counterinsurgency program. Rather than expanding their Special Forces program, whose specialty was already counterinsurgency, the army assigned these counterinsurgency missions to existing combat divisions that were already fighting in a conventional mode. These units viewed counterinsurgency as an unwelcomed additional duty. "The army did little to alter its force structure to meet the special requirements of counterinsurgency."[101]

Despite President Kennedy's desire, the army never revised their counterinsurgency doctrine before sending troops to South Vietnam in 1965.[102] The army entered Vietnam with a conventional war doctrine that was well suited for any battle in Europe. U.S. Army doctrine was based on Antoin-Henri Jomini's Napoleonic

[98] Hunt, *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam's Hearts and Minds*, 17.

[99] James W. Dunn, "Province Advisers in Vietnam, 1962-1965," in *Lessons from an Unconventional War*, ed. Richard A. Hunt and Richard H. Schultz Jr. (New York: Pergamon Press, 1982), 1–22.

[100] Claude C. Sturgill, *Low Intensity Conflict in American History* (Westport: Praeger, 1993), 100; Hunt, *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam's Hearts and Minds*, 16.

[101] Hunt, *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam's Hearts and Minds*, 19.

[102] Krepinevich, Jr., *The Army and Vietnam*, 38–46.

art of war theory: the object of warfare is the destruction of the enemy's forces. This dogma was so ingrained in the army's culture and top leadership that they disregarded any suggestions that called for a more appropriate counterinsurgency technique.

After two years of conventional fighting, the army made no fundamental changes in its counterinsurgency doctrine when it published a new Field Manual (FM 31-16) on Counter-guerrilla Operations in March 1967.[103] Counterinsurgency was a duty added to the regular combat mission of divisions and brigades, but there were no changes in organizational structure nor any scaling down of firepower in fighting an insurgency. The manual did suggest the customs, activities, and well-being of the people be disturbed as little as possible, but the brigade was to use all weapons and equipment necessary to defeat the enemy. There was no call for increased mobility, lighter weapons or smaller units. Furthermore, it gave the commander wide discretion in interpreting the directive.[104] In reality, the new manual made no impact on tactical operations.

To improve coordination among the U.S. government agencies, President Kennedy formed an ad hoc special group for counterinsurgency composed of the heads of Department of Defense (DoD), the State Department (DOS), the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the U.S. Information Agency (USIA), the National Security Council, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Unfortunately, the group could never decide whether political or military measures deserved priority: some argued that programs to win political loyalty had to be first because that was a prerequisite for establishing security while others argued it was impossible to win the loyalty of people who were being exploited by the VC. Moreover, the two main players, the DoD and the DOS, were unwilling to give up any control over their respective programs in South Vietnam. Richard Hunt assesses "these disagreements reflected uncertainty within the administration as to the nature of the VC threat and the appropriate response."[105]

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[103] Richard A. Hunt, "Strategies at War: Pacification and Attrition in Vietnam," in *Lessons from an Unconventional War: Reassessing U.S. Strategies for Future Conflicts*, ed. Richard A. Hunt and Richard H. Shultz, Jr. (New York: Pergamon Press, 1982), 26.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Hunt, *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam's Hearts and Minds*, 18.

Numerous reports and studies show leaders in Washington were aware of the VC threat and tried to make changes within the different U.S. bureaucracies to counter the VC. Robert Komer, CORDS' first director in Vietnam, explains that from the outset of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, there was a call for an alternative approach to military power.[106] However, for the first year in Vietnam, the U.S. Army stuck with their conventional tactics, using massive firepower and high-tech weaponry to fight both the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and the VC. With little to no progress being gained using these tactics, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara committed to capping deployments of ground forces and putting more emphasis on pacification efforts.

Pacification is a term borrowed from the French, which unfortunately also includes colonialist overtones. One of the various definitions of pacification is the process of making peace or reconciliation; to bring about a peaceful submission. Most decision makers agreed with this broad and very general definition, but pinning down specific strategies for pacification varied widely.

The reality in Vietnam was the Vietnamese people, not the enemy, needed to be the objective for the U.S. The VC was intent on destroying the "social adhesive that had traditionally integrated the villager into his society and provided him with a sense of identity."[107] William Andrews goes on to state their "purpose was not only to eliminate those who could be harmful to the movement, but also make the people afraid and keep them from cooperating with the government."[108]

A chilling first-hand account of an example of how the VC controlled the local population was provided by Retired Colonel Robert B. Rigg, USA:

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[106] The first study, "Program for the Pacification and Long-Term Development of Vietnam" (PROVN) was developed by a group of U.S. Army officers in 1965 and stressed that pacification should be designated as the major U.S./GVN effort. Scoville, *Reorganizing for Pacification Support,* 29; Krepinevich, *Army and Vietnam,* 180–182; Komer, "Was There another Way?," 212; R. W. Komer, *Organization and Management of the "New Model" Pacification Program–1966-1969* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1970), 2–3.

[107] William R. Andrews, *The Village War: Vietnamese Communist Revolutionary Activities in Ding Toung Province 1960-1964* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1973), 51.

[108] Ibid., 55–56.

The hamlet was at peace. The war had been there several times before, but it had moved away. In the glow of a red hot sunset, children played. Parents felt reasonably secure, and all awaited the cooling comfort of nightfall. Both men and women had worked hard in the marshy steaming rice fields. Lanterns were being lit in the market place when five strangers appeared. A sixth man, with fear written on the tortured lines of his pale face, was in the midst of the five. The peasants grew quiet as they watched this pale man being tied to a tree by the strangers. The execution was simple. Every eye saw the pale man's entrails spill out as he was disemboweled with a rusty bayonet. A woman shrieked and clutched a small child. Moments later both were seized by the grim-featured strangers. No one moved except the strangers as they beheaded the child. The woman collapsed in sobbing hysteria. Her quivering body was turned over and her black pajama-like costume was harshly stripped off revealing the nakedness of a pregnant figure. Within minutes she lay still in death with four small angry red bullet holes across her abdomen. Some of the peasants vomited, other turned their frightened eyes away. The strangers spoke for the first time. "Do not cooperate with the puppet government or the Americans. If you do, we shall return and this will happen to you!"[109]

Horrific acts such as this were not uncommon. They made the villagers believe the South Vietnamese Government (GVN) had neither the ability nor the will to protect its own people. The vast majority of the population in the rural villages was simple farmers or peasants who did not support the VC or their cause. However, the villagers could not support the U.S. and the GVN pacification efforts due to lack of security.

C.   MILITARY BATTLE VERSUS POLITICAL STRUGGLE?

As stated above, there were two parallel but separate wars being fought in Vietnam: one military, one political. Pacification was seen as either civil or military, but not as a joint civil-military process. Most military personnel agreed that there had to be security before any sort of development could occur. Most civilian officials thought civilian development would foster support from the population, which in time would bring about military success. This created a conflict for the U.S. in how they approached

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[109] Robert R. Rigg, *How to Stay Alive in Vietnam: Combat Survival in the War of many Fronts* (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1966), 12–13.

the war. According to Thomas Scoville, based on the amount of resources and emphasis devoted to the military in Vietnam by the U.S. government, a de facto policy was established in favor of a military solution.[110]

The tide started shifting towards pacification efforts when at the Manila Conference in October 1966, South Vietnamese leaders committed up to 60 percent of Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) infantry battalions towards Revolutionary Development (RD) and the U.S. reorganized its pacification efforts into the Office of Civil Operations.[111] This was President Johnson's plan to finally get "the other war" into the mainstream of the overall war effort.

D.   THE OTHER WAR

Robert Komer became President Johnson's chief White House advisor on pacification and joined forces with other Americans who believed the U.S. was expending too many resources on the conventional war and not enough on counterinsurgency programs. Komer decided the first item of business was to improve coordination among the organizations who were involved in the pacification efforts: the CIA, the DoD, the USAID, the DoS, the USIA, and the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office.[112] After years of failed attempts at coordinating the activities of these various agencies, it was time for something on a larger scale.

On the advice of Komer and Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, President Johnson decided finally to unify the civilian and military pacification efforts. President Johnson signed the National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 362 on 9 May 1967 creating CORDS. The NSAM charged General William Westmoreland (COMUSMACV) with American civil and military support of pacification and named Komer (DEPCORDS) as his deputy for pacification with the personal rank of ambassador. As Gen Westmoreland's deputy, Komer had the authority and power of a

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[110] Scoville, *Reorganizing for Pacification Support,* 4.

[111] CORDS actually combined the names of these two separate offices since they were both providing support for pacification.

[112] Mark Moyar, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey: The CIA's Secret Campaign to Destroy the Viet Cong* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1997), 48.

three-star general. NSAM 362 also clarified that Komer was to be a manger and supervisor …in other words, not just over there as a political advisor. Secretary of Defense McNamara told Komer this language needed to be in NSAM 362 because "you can't run a railroad unless you have the authority."[113] This was also the first time in history an ambassador served directly under a military commander and was in the chain of command.[114] Moreover, Komer stated "the problem was one of field execution, not Washington organization …the real problems were not in Washington any longer but in Vietnam …we could not manage the "other" war from 11,000 miles away."[115] It was time to manage the pacification efforts at the front line.

Placing pacification under the military made the most sense. Komer surmised "the military are far better able to organize, manage and execute major field programs under chaotic wartime conditions than are civilian agencies, by and large."[116] The change was needed for three reasons.

1. Normal governmental coordination was inadequate since all civil and military pacification tasks were intertwined

2. The problem was too large and complex for civilian agencies to handle alone

3. Pacification was failing due to lack of military security and the military would take security more seriously if it were directly responsible for pacification[117]

CORDS proved to be the turning point in the U.S. pacification effort. What made CORDS different from its predecessors was its "comprehensive nature and massive scale of effort undertaken."[118] The previously separate civilian and military pacification efforts were now combined into one program and resulted in what may have been the only truly integrated civilian-military command in U.S. history.

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[113] Komer, "*Organization and Management of the "New Model" Pacification Program–1966-1969*," 27.

[114] Ibid., 59.

[115] Scoville, *Reorganizing for Pacification Support*, 54.

[116] Robert W. Komer, "Clear, Hold and Rebuild," *Army* 20, no. 5 (May 1970): 19.

[117] Scoville, *Reorganizing for Pacification Support*, 54.

[118] Komer, *Impact of Pacification on Insurgency in South Vietnam*, 3.

Now CORDS was fully incorporated into General Westmoreland's Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV). Initially, Gen Westmoreland's staff was not too keen on the idea of a civilian being in the command structure. However, Gen Westmoreland gave CORDS and Komer his full support because he knew pacification was a key to success.[119] The General also recommended the best Army officers for Komer's staff.

The U.S. civilian agencies were not so much opposed to combining their pacification efforts as to being placed under the military. Institutionally, civilian agencies stay out of military operations and in return, the military viewed pacification matters as civilian business. The civilians were also afraid that pacification was now becoming militarized. In fact, the only reason unification happened this time was because the order came directly from the White House. Ironically, Komer mused that moving CORDS under the military "resulted in greater U.S. civilian influence over pacification than had ever existed before."[120] In CORDS, civilian and military entities were truly partnered. Soldiers served directly under civilians and vice versa. They even wrote each other's performance reports. The pairing of a military commander with a civilian deputy for pacification was replicated down to the district levels, ensuring full integration into the military structure. Personnel serving as province senior advisors were approximately half military and half civilian. Billets were filled from all military branches and from State, USAID, CIA, USIA, and the White House. Moreover, appointment to CORDS positions were merit-based and no preference was given to either military or civilian personnel. At its start, CORDS had approximately 4,000 military and 800 civilians and eventually put teams in all 250 districts and 44 provinces in South Vietnam.[121]

Since CORDS had no real predecessor, they wrote their operating procedures as they went along. They were less constrained by prior practices and were able to take an

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[119] William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1976), 215.

[120] Robert W. Komer, *Bureaucracy at War: U.S. Performance in the Vietnam Conflict* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986), 118; Komer, "Was There Another Way?," 217–218; Krepinevich, *Army and Vietnam*, 218.

[121] Ross Coffey, "Revisiting CORDS: The Need for Unity of Effort to Secure Victory in Iraq," *Military Review* (June 2008): 12; Komer, *Bureaucracy at War: U.S. Performance in the Vietnam Conflict*, 119.

innovative, flexible and pragmatic approach to pacification. Instead of writing more memos on what needed to be done, they sent memos out asking how to do things. Komer explained CORDS was different because it was "action-oriented and management minded."[122] Their goal was to make these pacification programs work, not just talk more about them.

CORDS stressed the need to build viable and responsible political institutions at the local and national level. It called for land reform, rural development, and anticorruption measures. It also placed more emphasis on "clear and hold" by police and paramilitary forces to provide sustained protection to the rural population versus the military's "search and destroy" operations which were targeted on larger enemy units. It also stressed good political intelligence.[123]

Upon taking over CORDS, Komer proceeded to "consolidate management of programs and resources, enhance the influence of American advisors on South Vietnamese officials, invigorate efforts to combat the VC infrastructure, and improve the Regional Forces and Popular Forces (RF/PF)."[124] Gen Westmoreland knew CORDS would not succeed without security elements, so he agreed to give CORDS advisory responsibility for the RF/PF forces since they were responsible for village level security. Komer re-ordered pacification priorities and clarified direction through a crash program he dubbed Project TAKEOFF. TAKEOFF's eight action programs were:

- Improve 1968 pacification planning
- Accelerate *Chieu Hoi*[125]
- Mount attack on VC infrastructure (VCI)
- Expand and improve RVNAF support to pacification
- Expand and supplement RD team effort
- Increase capability to handle refugees

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[122] Komer, "*Organization and Management of the "New Model" Pacification Program–1966-1969*," 64.

[123] Komer, "Was There another Way?," 212.

[124] Hunt, *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam's Hearts and Minds*, 99.

[125] *Chieu Hoi* or "Open Arms," began in 1963 by the South Vietnamese Government. It offered clemency to insurgents willing to lay down their arms.

- Revamp police forces
- Press land reform[126]

1.   Improve 1968 Pacification Planning

It seems obvious the main improvement after unification would be coordination. The first order of business for Komer was to establish a joint planning group comprised of representatives from CORDS, USAID, and the Joint United States Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO). This group reviewed all pacification plans and developed guidelines. CORDS's position within the MACV staff also made it easier to integrate with military planners since they were right down the hall.[127] In an effort to streamline processes and ensure efficient use of resources, Komer changed pacification priority areas to match where the military was focusing their efforts and also administratively realigned pacification programs within provincial and district boundaries.[128]   Critical here was Komer's insistence that the military and the civilians were in sync administratively as to how they viewed the battle space.

2.   Accelerate *Chieu Hoi*

President Diem originally created this program back in 1963 at the suggestion of the CIA. The concept of the program was a "rallier" (the term used for people who defected) was offered amnesty if they left the Communists. They would be questioned by the *Chieu Hoi* on VC tactics, areas of VC operations, location of VC cadre, other information deemed of intelligence value, etc. Then the goal was for these folks to be integrated back into GVN life. In Komer's opinion, this was the most cost-effective program going. CORDS initially increased the number of advisors assigned to this

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[126] Hunt, *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam's Hearts and Minds,* 100.

[127] Ibid., 101.

[128] Komer, "*Organization and Management of the "New Model" Pacification Program–1966-1969,*" 66.

program and the capacity of the reception centers doubled in 1967. During 1967, over 27,000 defected from the VC or North Vietnamese forces.[129] The biggest payoff came in 1969 when 47,000 came in, raising the total to 140,000 since 1963.[130]

Unfortunately, *Chieu Hoi* failed to reach its greatest potential because CORDS could not convince the GVN an insurgent could be turned into a valuable asset. Of the 27,000 who defected in 1967, only about 5,400 received vocational training, most receiving it from American contractors or the U.S. Navy Seabees. The ARVN also refused to use former VCs. Instead of rehabilitating them, the defectors were often beaten and jailed.[131]

3.   Mount Attack on VC Infrastructure (VCI)

A systematic campaign was needed that targeted the VC's clandestine political and administrative infrastructure. These were the hard-core cadre that gave direction, handled recruitment, taxed the locals, and basically ran the guerilla war. Unfortunately, U.S. military leadership did not view the VCI as important as NVA military units, so it was up to the CIA and a few various civilian and GVN agencies to deal with.[132] The *Phung Hoang* (Phoenix) Program was an attempt to target the VCI. The concept was to identify, locate and arrest the VC cadre using standardized police-type procedures. Then they would be tried according to GVN law and imprisoned if found guilty.[133]

CORDS now had responsibility for this faltering program. Since Komer had served in the CIA for thirteen years, he knew what the organization was capable of and it was his obvious choice to head this effort.[134] The CIA was to act as an umbrella organization, providing common direction, doctrine, measurement and a reporting

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[129] Hunt, *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam's Hearts and Minds*, 101–102.

[130] Komer, "*Organization and Management of the "New Model" Pacification Program–1966-1969*," 172.

[131] Hunt, *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam's Hearts and Minds*, 102.

[132] Andrade, *Ashes to Ashes*, 12–13.

[133] Komer, "*Organization and Management of the "New Model" Pacification Program–1966-1969*," 158.

[134] Andrade, *Ashes to Ashes,* 58.

system.[135] The GVN was to run the program with the U.S. in an advisory role. A key objective of the Phoenix program was to get away from the dragnet type operations where a unit would roll into a village, detain every adult male villager and question them. Komer wanted a "rifle shot approach" versus the more commonly used "shotgun" operation …target an individual, do a background check, then go pick that one person up.[136]

Komer continued to believe the CIA was the right organization to develop the Phoenix program. He admitted it was not without its controversy:

> Few pacification sub-programs have been more controversial than the U.S.-supported GVN effort to do something at long last about neutralizing the clandestine VC political and administrative structure that was one of the secrets of the VC success … If Vietnam was a "people's war" as Hanoi called it, a political and revolutionary as much as a military conflict, then rooting out this network of perhaps 100,000 to 150,000 hard core cadre at its peak was one of the most critical tasks we faced. Without it, no matter what our purely military achievements, their lasting impact would be in doubt. It is a sad commentary on the overly conventional nature of the U.S./GVN approach to insurgency war that not until mid-1967 did we even begin to mount a major concerted attack on the VC clandestine political structure—its shadow government at all levels down to hamlet. Our failure was not because we didn't recognize the problem— you can find studies going all the way back to the mid-fifties that correctly identified the key VCI role. It was largely because nobody tackled it as an operational and management problem—it was everybody's business and nobody's. It fell between the cracks. The reason I began zeroing in on it in late 1966 was because I saw that winning over the farmers would require not just providing territorial security against the enemy main and local forces but also rooting out the clandestine political and terror apparatus. So I made it an integral part of pacification.[137]

Komer's frustration was how the GVN implemented the overall program. It was more than just identifying the enemy …the concept included both identification and

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[135] Komer, *Organization and Management of the "New Model" Pacification Program–1966-1969*, 162.

[136] Moyar, *Phoenix*, 149–150; Komer, *Organization and Management of the "New Model" Pacification Program–1966-1969*, 165.

[137] Komer, *Organization and Management of the "New Model" Pacification Program–1966-1969*, 158.

capture or another form of neutralization such as sentencing. The emphasis CORDS wanted was to capture and interrogate versus kill. Once the CIA brought the South Vietnamese Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRUs) in to support Phoenix, they had a tendency to kill the enemy instead of capture them.[138] Because the CIA controlled the PRUs and money was their principle motivator, PRUs were considered "mercenaries" by the American public.[139] Komer is adamant the Phoenix program did not violate the Geneva Convention nor was it a program of systematic political assassination.[140] Unfortunately, negative publicity surrounds the CIA, the Phoenix program (and CORDS, albeit erroneously) to this day.[141]

4. Expand and Improve RVNAF Support to Pacification

A key feature of the CORDS program was its emphasis on sustained security (local clear and hold) as the indispensible first stage of pacification. The pacification planners viewed the under-utilized, paramilitary Regional Forces and Popular Forces (RF and PF or "Ruff-Puffs," as they were often called) as the logical force on which to build.[142] They were all locally recruited and most were volunteers. In reality, they were lower-quality Vietnamese assets that no one else wanted.[143] However, the concept worked! They were lightly armed, meaning they were cheap to support, and already organized in small territorial units. RF served only in their own provinces and PF in their own districts. Primary responsibility for security of the local and rural populations devolved upon local forces recruited from the population itself.[144]

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[138] Moyer, *Phoenix*, 237.

[139] Ibid., 173.

[140] Komer, "Was There Another Way?," 217.

[141] Baritz, *Backfire: A History of How American Culture Led Us Into Vietnam and Made Us Fight The Way We Did*, 272–275; Andrade, *Ashes to Ashes*, xvii–xviii.

[142] Krepinevich, *Army and Vietnam*, 218.

[143] Komer, "Was There Another Way?," 215.

[144] Ibid., 216; Thomas C. Thayer, "Territorial Forces," in *The Lessons of Vietnam*, ed. W. Scott Thompson and Donaldson D. Frizzell (New York: Crane, Russak & Company, 1977), 256–257.

Once CORDS upgraded the RF/PF's equipment, improved pay and benefits, and placed their command under province and district chiefs, the RF/PF members' social status among the villages was elevated and their numbers started to increase greatly. MACV fielded 353 Mobile Advisory Teams (MAT), consisting of two U.S. officer and three NCOs to give on-the-job training to these RF/PF units. They expanded by more than 100,000 in 1968 alone and by 1973 numbered some 540,000 men in over 1600 RF companies and 7000 PF platoons.[145] Moreover, the Vietnamese men would rather serve in their local RF/PF forces because it meant they could stay close to home.

In a response to anti-VC feelings after the Tet Offensive in 1968 and the urging of Komer, President Thieu revived the People's Self-Defense Force (PSDF). The GVN required all able-bodied males, ages sixteen and seventeen and ages thirty-nine through fifty,[146] join the PSDF. Each member had to stand guard and serve as a lookout one night per week. The PSDF eventually grew to over 4 million and although the PSDF's usefulness in engaging the enemy was negligible at best, their most useful role was a means of engaging the local population politically.[147]

5.   **Expand and Supplement RD Team Effort**

The Revolutionary Development (RD) concept was the GVN's attempt to consolidate their current pacification efforts prior to CORDS. The RD cadre were recruited from where they would serve and attend training to become agents of social change at the National Training Center at Vung Tau. Teams of 59 men and women between the ages of 21 and 29 would work with a hamlet to: restore local elected government, assist in community self-help or government-subsidized development projects (such as repairing roads, buildings and bridges), provide medical treatment to the

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[145] Komer, "Was There Another Way?," 216–217.

[146] Males 18-38 had to serve in regular GVN organizations. Moyar, *Phoenix*, 162.

[147] Komer, "Was There Another Way?" 217; Moyer, *Phoenix*, 162.

ill and aid farmers.[148]   Teams also issued identification cards to civilians, recruited people for military service, organized self-defense groups, and conducted political rallies.[149]

Again, this program never reached its full potential in part because the GVN failed to provide proper incentives to attract and retain their best and brightest to this program. For instance, the GVN did not exempt cadre members from military service and they also refused to allow time spent on RD teams count towards their obligatory military duty. Moreover, these teams were not operating in the safest environments and were regular targets of the VC.

CORDS was able to make some headway with the program and increased the RD teams from 361 to 555 in 1967, but they could never get over the retention problem.[150] They would lose RD cadre as fast as they could get them through training to the ARVN. Komer had an idea to meld the PF and RD cadre into one GVN civil-military team, but it never materialized due to lack of GVN support.

6.   Increase Capability to Handle Refugees

CORDS took the refugee program over from USAID and tried its best to bring this issue to light. The Vietnamese had done little in this area and according to Komer, had no concept of a Refugee Ministry or welfare assistance. CORDS set up refugee programs using Army Civil Affairs teams and U.S. non-governmental organizations and religious charities. Once CORDS took over the refugee program, there were 1.5 million refugees with 1,000 people working in the Refugee Ministry with 60 U.S. advisors. They could re-settle approximately 1,000 people a month.[151]

There was also scuttlebutt that Komer had supported a controversial earlier U.S. policy that the military was intentionally creating refugees in order to deny the enemy

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[148] Hunt, *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam's Hearts and Minds*, 37.

[149] Ibid.

[150] Komer, "*Organization and Management of the "New Model" Pacification Program–1966-1969*," 68–69.

[151] Ibid., 177.

access to manpower in the countryside.[152] Andrew Krepinevich finds "between 1964 and 1969 over 3 million South Vietnamese, 20 percent of the population, were refugees at one time or another as a result of the attrition strategy and the policy of population relocation."[153] Komer urged General Westmoreland to stop creating refugees because CORDS could not handle anymore. Komer also demanded the military take responsibility and temporarily care for the displaced persons caused by their military operations.[154] However, the damage had already been done …the majority of the refugees blamed the U.S. and GVN for their predicament.[155]

7.   Revamp Police Forces

In the initial stages of an insurgency, Komer viewed the role of the local police as decisive. If the insurgency is too large-scale, then it is beyond the capabilities of a police force alone and the military has to step in. However, at all stages of an insurgency, the police play a key role in "coping with any clandestine political structure like the VCI."[156] Komer stated since 1955 the U.S. supported the Vietnamese National Police, but in his opinion, the U.S. did not do as much as they should have. Moreover, he suggests it would have been much cheaper than supporting the ARVN.

When CORDS tried to expand the police force, they ran into difficulties. South Vietnamese males between the age of eighteen and twenty-eight had an obligation to serve in the military and the police were not allowed to recruit from this pool of applicants. The police could recruit military veterans, but those individuals were subject to being recalled back to military service. Unfortunately, the police forces did not attract

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[152] Komer, *Organization and Management of the "New Model" Pacification Program–1966-1969*," 174–177.

[153] Krepinevich, *Army and Vietnam*, 226.

[154] Hunt, *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam's Hearts and Minds*, 104.

[155] Krepinevich, *Army and Vietnam*, 227.

[156] Komer, *Organization and Management of the "New Model" Pacification Program–1966-1969*," 168.

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the highest caliber of recruits and those they did attract were often economically challenged. This created a situation that made the police force vulnerable to corruption and bribes.[157]

8. Press Land Reform

When Komer was back in an advisory role in the White House in 1966-1967, he pushed complex land reform measures. It was not until he was in Vietnam that he backed off from this. Komer realized land reform during wartime was difficult and any changes had to be simple to execute. Komer also got into a turf battle with USAID over who should manage the land reform. Moreover, GVN was in favor of more impractical land reform schemes. CORDS proposed simpler measures such as freezing land rents and putting a moratorium on ownership disputes.[158]

Land reform remained a dormant issue with CORDS until 1969. In 1970, over 900,000 acres of land were distributed free to some 300,000 families and by 1973, well over half the rural population benefited from land reform.[159]

E. OTHER AREAS OF EMPHASIS

CORDS not only enhanced local protection and area security, it also focused its efforts on nation- and state-building. The concepts of Jeffersonian democracy had to win over the Communist version of People's democracy or the entire military battle was for naught. The civil programs CORDS managed were aimed at: 1) reviving a functioning rural administration, 2) rural economic revival with incentives for farmers, and 3) other essential rural services such as medical, education, refugee care and a civil police presence.[160] Many of these programs were already attempted piecemeal under USAID, but they were consolidated under CORDS.

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[157] Hunt, *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam's Hearts and Minds*, 104.

[158] Komer, "*Organization and Management of the "New Model" Pacification Program–1966-1969*," 70–71.

[159] Komer, "Was There Another Way?," 218.

[160] Komer, *Impact of Pacification on Insurgency in South Vietnam*," 6.

CORDS really set the stage for a concerted GVN/U.S. effort towards restoring village and hamlet self-government. From 1967-1970, the villagers elected hamlet chiefs and village councils, created village budgets, and reformed their local taxes. The local security forces and police were moved under the village chief's authority in 1969. The village councils managed their own GVN self-help funds and decided how to prioritize projects in their villages. There was always a conscious effort on the part of CORDS not to Americanize the projects. The goal was to push ownership of projects down to the village level. Ultimately, CORDS helped to create a grassroots movement that focused on security and community development.[161]

As for economic revival in the rural areas, CORDS assisted the GVN with efforts to close the urban-rural gap. The focus was on agricultural improvements since the vast majority of the rural population were farmers. When it comes down to it, most farmers were not that interested in the Saigon government. So, CORDS implemented projects that impacted farmers where it really mattered—their pocketbooks! Crop producers were given more money for their products, new rice strains were introduced, fertilizer was distributed, and key roads and waterways were re-opened and upgraded to improve trade and market routes. Rural taxes were temporarily abolished and water pumps and tractors were introduced in large numbers.[162]

1. Importance of People

Even in an ideal operating environment where one is not hindered by bureaucratic policies and regulations, without the right people in the right positions, the job will not get done. The leader is ultimately the one who sets the tempo for getting things done. From President Johnson to General Westmoreland, all agree that Komer was the right man for the job. With the nickname of "Blowtorch," he pushed himself and his people hard. According to General Westmoreland, "Komer blustered, sometimes blundered,

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[161] Coffey, "Revisiting CORDS: The Need for Unity of Effort to Secure Victory in Iraq," 14.

[162] Komer, *Impact of Pacification on Insurgency in South Vietnam,* 6.

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knocked heads together, wrote one caustic memorandum after another to any and all on whatever subject, including strategy. He had imaginative ideas, usually sound. At the start [of CORDS] abrasion was in order. Komer was the man for the job."[163]

When General Creighton Abrams replaced Gen Westmoreland as MACV commander in June 1968, Abrams had a very different opinion of Komer. Abrams was suspicious of Komer and thought he was a lackey for the boys back in Washington.[164] Abrams did not appreciate Komer's gruff ways and thought it made a negative impact on the Vietnamese. Ambassador William Colby took over as DEPCORDS in November 1968 when Komer became U.S. ambassador to Turkey. Colby's personality gelled with Abrams' and CORDS continued to make progress until it was eventually disbanded at the end of 1972.

As for his staff, Komer carefully selected six or seven of the best personnel he could find to surround himself with (ex. Richard Holbrooke, Colonel Robert M. Montague, Jr, and Richard Moorsteen.) Since the entire mission of pacification was focused on people, it was all the more important to have the right people who understood the CORDS vision in key positions. Komer reflected he and his staff of six or seven did more than he ever could have with a 100-man staff.[165]

2.   Measuring Performance

CORDS attempted to find an evaluation system for their programs that moved away from the American tendency to over-inflate statistics. Moreover, "VCI neutralization" had become a critical measuring stick for field unit performance.[166] One thing was for sure, casualty ratios were not going to work for CORDS. Komer admitted when CORDS was first established, figuring out how to measure its success was going to be tricky. CORDS borrowed the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) from the CIA and the

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[163] Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 215.

[164] Lewis Sorley, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1999), 62–63.

[165] R. W. Komer, *Organization and Management of the "New Model" Pacification Program–1966-1969* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1970), 28.

[166] Moyer, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey: The CIA's Secret Campaign to Destroy the Viet Cong*, 189.

U.S. Marines and tweaked it for their use. Basically, it was a matrix with five different grading categories the district advisors filled out in an attempt to gather standard quantitative data on pacification efforts in every South Vietnamese village. In order to get accurate, truthful data, Komer made it clear to the U.S. district advisors that HES was an evaluation system on the GVN, not on themselves. In other words, their performance reports were not directly correlated to how their villages were graded. The HES received a lot of negative press and Komer agreed the HES had its weaknesses, but given the situation on the ground and the resources, they had to work with, it sufficed.[167] A postwar study of the HES confirmed it was the most effective system to use at the time for the data CORDS was capturing.[168]

F.   CORDS: SUCCESS OR FAILURE?

Is it too presumptuous to suggest that since the North Vietnamese relied on conventional means to overthrow South Vietnam, CORDS and the pacification programs were successful? William Colby stated, "The attack of 1972 and the final attack of 1975 were pure North Vietnamese military attacks. There were no guerrillas in those operations because in the interim our program actually won the guerilla war by winning the guerilla to the government. They were all on the government side."[169] There are records that show members of the VC also shared Colby's viewpoint. A VC official surrendered to the RF/PF in 1971 and reported, "recruiting became nearly impossible in his region after the pacification program reached full operating capacity in 1969."[170] The pacification strategy arguably defeated the VC, but unfortunately, it did not have the same impact on the North Vietnamese forces.

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[167] Komer, *Organization and Management of the "New Model" Pacification Program–1966-1969*, 200–201.

[168] Lewis Sorley, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam*, 71.

[169] Paul Seidenmann, "Pacification: A Winning Combination that Came too Late?," *Armed Forces Journal International* 114 (January 1977): 25.

[170] David R. Palmer, *Summons of the Trumpet* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1978), 286–87.

Pacification critics claim the U.S. made the Vietnamese people lazy and too reliant upon U.S. presence.[171] Henry Kissinger stated in 1969, "Unfortunately, our military strength has no political corollary; we have been unable so far to create a political structure that could survive military opposition from Hanoi after we withdraw."[172] During a November 1969 seminar, Komer was asked if the reason the U.S. was not making more progress in the pacification area was because of the Vietnamese people. His response:

> Let me return now to the thesis that we couldn't do anything because of the Vietnamese! Pacification was 99 percent Vietnamese program! Every operating element of pacification was run by the GVN with GVN personnel. We had roughly speaking a 100 to 1 ratio of Vietnamese to advisors. Nor were we in the command channel. We did things behind the scenes, but mostly by informally and very discreetly cluing the Vietnamese top management. I couldn't issue any orders to the Vietnamese, nor could Westmoreland. Thus in pacification we did get a truly Vietnamese program going on a really major scale! And remember, we had the lowest grade Vietnamese assets. When we say that we did make a Vietnamese program work from behind the scenes, it looks all the more impressive when you realize what we had to work with were the ragtag and bobtail of the Vietnamese assets. We got the local militia, not the ARVN. We got the crummy "White Mice," the Police, not the fancy military intelligence guys. We got what was left; we got the local officials, not the hot-shots who were big wheels in Saigon. In other words, we built pacification with the assets that were really not being utilized. This never appears in the documents!
>
> Interviewer: What you're saying is that it is a fallacy to say that the Vietnamese cannot do it.
>
> Komer: Yes! While we put pacification on the map, we did it by selling it to the Vietnamese, getting the right Vietnamese put in the right places, dealing with those Vietnamese (including Thieu) who were sold on pacification. It was their program, even though we exerted an immense behind-the-scenes influence on concepts, structure, planning, etc. If we could do that with pacification, it could be done with ARVN. Maybe it is being done with ARVN at long last. We actually got Vietnamese officials fired by mounting a campaign with the top people. In this case it had to be

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[171] Harry G. Summers, Jr., *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (New York: Presidio Press, 1982), 175–176.

[172] Record, *The Wrong War: Why we Lost in Vietnam*, 139.

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President Thieu, because at least initially nobody was willing to act without the President. We got a whole slew of them fired—more than half the province chiefs, and, as of the time I left, a third of the district chiefs.[173]

Komer is also the first to admit that CORDS was not an efficient, high-impact program. In fact, Komer points out like most things in Vietnam, it was cumbersome, wasteful, poorly executed, and only spottily effective in many respects.[174] Another criticism of CORDS is it over-simplified the issue and made quantity substitute for quality. It is a truism that CORDS provided sustained security and other support in the rural areas for over 10,000 hamlets in 250 districts of 44 provinces by applying one of the principles of war: mass. The only way to sustain rural security on this vast scale was manpower, and lots of it! Komer saw the mass approach as "the only feasible way to get early countrywide impact, given the extent of the need, the limited quality of the resources available, the GVNs limited administrative capabilities and the lateness of the day."[175] CORDS utilized all available resources by working multiple programs simultaneously, but according to a realistic set of priorities. Komer points out the concept seemed overly simplistic, but it was "essential to avoid a major weakness of the previous efforts, when securing forces stayed only briefly and then moved on, after which hamlets often retrogressed."[176]

CORDS has also been criticized for having too many U.S. advisors. During 1967, approximately 4,000 military and 800 civilians served in CORDS. At its peak in 1969, CORDS had 6,400 military and 1,000 civilians. The following is Komer's response when asked if he over-Americanized pacification:

> This argument falls of its own weight when one looks at the facts. By the time I left Vietnam, CORDS had grown to about 5500 advisors, but it was assisting and supporting roughly 550,000 Vietnamese—a 100 to 1 ratio. By 1970, CORDS had reached about 7200, but Vietnamese inputs had

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[173] Komer, *"Organization and Management of the "New Model" Pacification Program–1966-1969,"* 6–7.

[174] Komer, "Was There Another Way?," 218.

[175] Robert Komer, "Pacification: A Look Back and Ahead," *Army* 20, no. 6 (June 1970): 24.

[176] Komer, "Was There Another Way?," 215.

also grown accordingly. A 100 to 1 ration hardly seems excessive when one consider the number of sub-programs the U.S. is supporting, and the fact that countrywide pacification means operating in 4 regions, 44 provinces, 250-odd districts, and over 2000 villages in South Vietnam. Moreover, over half the U.S. advisors were either junior officers and NCOs working with RF/PF or administrative/logistics people taking care of internal U.S. house-keeping in the field. All in all, CORDS appears as a quite lean operation both in comparison with the U.S. military establishment in Vietnam and in terms of the results it achieved. By any standard of cost-effectiveness, the American advisory investment looks rather good indeed.[177]

There is also an argument that the U.S. did not send enough conventional troops to win the military battle. Robert Morris explains, "although sending 2.5 million troops over ten years seems high, eighty percent of U.S. troop strength were in support roles. At U.S. peak strength with 500,000, only about 100,000 were "trigger pullers" out in the jungles. According to lessons learned from the British in Malaya, conventional forces need at least a ten to one superiority to keep insurgents under control."[178]

Other criticism of the CORDS program is generally focused on its limited duration and scope. Komer and Colby have repeatedly stated the pacification efforts in Vietnam were too little, too late.[179] According to Komer, even after 1967, "pacification remained a small tail to the very large conventional military dog. It was never tried on a large enough scale until too late."[180]

The main take away is CORDS was a major GVN/U.S. program specifically created to address the atypical problems in Vietnam. The interrelationship of U.S. civilian, military and GVN counterpart functions allowed for a more efficient use of resources. It was far more cost-effective than other parts of the war effort. It entailed

[177] Komer, "*Organization and Management of the "New Model" Pacification Program–1966-1969*," 187–188.

[178] Robert E. Morris, "Why We Lost the War in Vietnam: An Analysis," in *The Real Lessons of the Vietnam War: Reflections Twenty-Five Years after the Fall of Saigon*, ed. John N. Moore & Robert F. Turner (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2002), 388–389.

[179] Komer, *Bureaucracy at War: U.S. Performance in the Vietnam Conflict;* William E. Colby, *Lost Victory: A Firsthand Account of America's Sixteen-Year Involvement in Vietnam* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1989).

[180] Coffey, "Revisiting CORDS: The Need for Unity of Effort to Secure Victory in Iraq," 16.

only a "modest fraction of the enormous cost of the Vietnam War and was tailored directly to the needs of the environment."[181] Whatever its faults, the CORDS program stands out as one of the few efforts undertaken by the GVN and the U.S. that addressed the key problems of dealing with rural-based insurgency.[182]

G.   LESSONS FOR AFGHANISTAN

Although there are probably a number of lessons that could be pulled from the study of the pacification effort in Vietnam, this thesis will focus on how the following four macro-level lessons along with several corresponding sub-lessons can be applied to the current efforts in Afghanistan:

1.   Unity of Effort

This is what put CORDS on the map. Pacification efforts in Vietnam attempted pre-CORDS were never able to make a significant impact on the battlefield because they were not attempted on a large enough scale and they did not have the support of the military. It was not until all facets of the pacification effort were combined under a single-manager (Komer) and moved under MACV did that start to change. Having a coordinated civilian-military effort ensured the efficient and effective use of resources. CORDS further capitalized on this by using a de-centralized approach and giving advisors at the district and village level the flexibility to make decisions on programs that were specific to their area of responsibility.

2.   Right People in the Right Positions

Komer knew the only way for pacification to work in Vietnam was to have the best people with the right attitude and focus. He and his small, hand-selected staff worked to get the best civilians in the various advisory positions. All civilian advisors went through 13-weeks of intensive training and those who showed an aptitude for the Vietnamese language stayed longer. Once CORDS personnel were in-country, they

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[181] Coffey, "Revisiting CORDS: The Need for Unity of Effort to Secure Victory in Iraq," 15.

[182] Komer, "Was There Another Way?," 218.

attended another class which was usually hosted by Komer himself. He constantly communicated the pacification message and had no qualms about replacing those who did not meet his standards. Those he liked, he created incentives for them to stay in their positions longer. It is critical people working at all levels understand the culture, history, language, and impact of their decisions.

3.   Ownership has to Start at the Local Level

CORDS helped the GVN build viable and responsible political institutions at the local level. Komer made it clear these were GVN programs with the U.S. in a supporting role. CORDS also prioritized programs that were important to the large population of peasant farmers: land reform, rural development, and anticorruption measures. But above all else, Komer stressed CORDS was successful because the Vietnamese people were in the lead from the top down to the lowest level possible--the village. If the local people do not support or believe in the programs that are being implemented by the government, they will not be sustained in the long run.

4.   Sustainable Security

CORDS emphasized sustained security at the local level as the indispensible first stage of pacification. CORDS utilized the local police and paramilitary forces to provide sustained protection to the rural population versus the military's "search and destroy" operations, which were targeted on larger enemy units. CORDS viewed the under-utilized, paramilitary RF and PF as the logical force on which to build. They were all locally recruited and most were volunteers. They were lightly armed, meaning they were cheap to support, and already organized in small territorial units. RF served only in their own provinces and PF in their own districts. Primary responsibility for security of the local and rural populations devolved upon local forces recruited from the population itself. CORDS put the onus for securing the local environment back on the local population. Ultimately, the implementation and sustainability of all programs depends on security of the population.

H.   SUMMARY

In his memoirs, William Colby said CORDS worked, but "the experience has hardly been noticed in accounts of the Vietnam War. A new situation could thus well require the same laborious and costly process of experimentation that preceded CORDS. It was a better way then, but it came too late for the American people, whatever its successes on the ground. We cannot afford to stumble again before some new challenge."[183]

However, Samuel P. Huntington warns that "every historical event or confluence of events is unique" and we should not draw "mislessons" from Vietnam since the exact set of circumstances will never be duplicated elsewhere.[184] Robert Pfaltzgraff echoes Huntington's thought with his own warning on applying lessons from Vietnam to future conflicts:

> The military lessons of the Vietnam War, while numerous, are by no means either self-evident or instructive about wars of the future. If the United States succeeded or failed in Vietnam because of its inability to adapt quickly to the circumstances of Vietnam or its penchant for conducting the war in Vietnam with capabilities and doctrines developed and tested in conflicts elsewhere, similar problems may arise in the wars of the future. Therefore, a learning of the military lessons of Vietnam, without regard for the unique characteristics of the Vietnam War and future wars, will serve American policy in those potential conflicts no more adequately than did the strategies and capabilities utilized in Vietnam.[185]

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[183] Colby, *Lost Victory: A Firsthand Account of America's Sixteen-Year Involvement in Vietnam*, 373.

[184] Samuel P. Huntington, *Military Intervention, Political Involvement, and the Unlessons of Vietnam* (Chicago, IL: The Adali Stevenson Institute of International Affairs, 1968), 1–2.

[185] Robert Pfaltzgraff, "Was Failure Inevitable? Some Concluding Perspectives," in *The Lessons of Vietnam*, ed. W. Scott Thompson and Donaldson D. Frizzell (New York: Crane, Russak & Company, 1977), 277.

The point of this thesis is not to imply CORDS is a cookie-cutter approach for stabilizing Afghanistan or for that matter, any other future conflict. However, the fact that the U.S. invested enormous amounts of resources and manpower into Vietnam, yet ultimately had little overall impact, should not be a footnote in history. This was not lost on Harry Summers either:

> From the American professional soldier's perspective, the most frustrating aspect of the Vietnam conflict is that the U.S. armed forces did everything they were supposed to do, winning every major battle of the war, yet North Vietnam, rather than the United States, triumphed in the end. How could U.S. troops have succeeded so well, but the war effort have failed so miserably?[186]

Summers last statement seems implausible. How could U.S. troops who have the high-tech weaponry, massive artillery and are the best trained forces in the world, win battles, but still lose the war? The same has been said about our current efforts in Afghanistan. This would suggest either 1) we are not applying conventional tactics in the right way or 2) something other than conventional tactics are needed to win. The next chapter will make the case for number two, that something other than conventional tactics are needed to win. Hopefully, there is still time to change the course of history so veterans who served in Afghanistan are not asking the same type of questions as they did after Vietnam.

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[186] Harry G. Summers, "Lessons: A Soldier's View," in *Vietnam as History* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 109.

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IV.   APPLICATION TO AFGHANISTAN

A.   INTRODUCTION

Defining what success means in Afghanistan is complicated. Even more elusive is determining how we get there. The international community is eight years into the conflict and arguably still does not agree on what the end state for Afghanistan should look like, much less the path we take to get there. NATO finally issued a "strategic vision" for Afghanistan in April 2008 at its 20th Summit in Bucharest, Romania. Its objectives: "extremism and terrorism will no longer pose a threat to stability, Afghan National Security Forces will be in the lead and self-sufficient, and the Afghan National Government will be able to extend the reach of good governance, reconstruction, and development throughout the country to the benefit of all its citizens."[187] On the surface, this end state for Afghanistan sounds realistic. However, how does it translate into strategy.

The only way to work towards this strategic vision for Afghanistan is by focusing on the four pillars of post-conflict reconstruction: governance and participation, social and economic well-being, justice and reconciliation, and security. These four pillars are inter-related and in order to achieve real and lasting results, have to be integrated, coordinated and synchronized. As captured in the 2005 Afghanistan Millennium Development Goals Report, "Development without security is unachievable, and security without development is meaningless."[188]

If figuring out a plan for each of these four pillars was not enough to contend with, adding to Afghanistan's complexity are the range of actors providing support to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA), including NATO, the United Nations (UN), various other international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as individual states. Each actor has their own, and

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[187] ISAF's Strategic Vision.

[188] UNDP, *Millennium Development Goals Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Country Report 2005: Vision 2020* (2005), 9, http://www.ands.gov.af/mdgsgroups.asp (accessed August 5, 2009).

sometimes even competing, set of interests and priorities. Furthermore, since the security situation in Afghanistan is so poor, the military has to be an integral part of the broader strategy because establishing and maintaining a secure environment is the lynchpin for the other three pillars.

This chapter will provide a current status of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in Afghanistan and a brief history of how they got to where they are today. The chapter will then explore various initiatives sponsored by the international community in Afghanistan and how these programs can actually be a unifying strategy for ISAF PRT efforts. Finally, the chapter will discuss how the four macro-lessons and various sub-lessons from CORDS could be applied to the current situation in Afghanistan.

B.   CURRENT STATUS OF ISAF

ISAF is actively working to create the conditions of security and stability that will allow the GIRoA to carry out its reconstruction and development plans with the ultimate goal of transforming itself into a stable democracy. Currently, there are 26 PRTs in Afghanistan (12 U.S.-led) with different lead nations responsible for the five separate Regional Commands.[189] (This fact alone undoubtedly creates complexities that Komer did not have to contend with in Vietnam.) ISAF is a multi-national alliance comprised of countries that have different resources, capabilities and various goals to accomplish in Afghanistan. In fact, one of the chief criticisms of the PRT program is that seven years after its implementation, it still operates with no structured template. Each lead nation

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[189] Detailed information on the mission and role of ISAF in Afghanistan including current PRT placement and lead nation information is available at: http://www.nato.int/issues/isaf/index.html (accessed August 8, 2009) and http://www.nato.int/issues/afghanistan/index.html (accessed August 8, 2009).

basically runs its own program according to its national interests and political will, which is not necessarily always in the best interest of the Afghan people.[190]

In October 2008, an effort was made to close the strategy gap by the former COMISAF, U.S. Army General David McKiernan. The primary goal of this new Joint Campaign Plan (JCP) was to transfer lead security responsibilities to the Afghans. Afghans would now be responsible for both planning and conducting operations. Another big shift was the JCP used language that referred to the ISAF mission in COIN terms (ex., "insurgents" and "shape, clear, hold, build") versus NATO's previous preference for only focusing on stability operations.[191] ISAF's new mission statement became: "ISAF conducts operations in partnership with GIRoA and in coordination with Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), and the international community in order to assist GIRoA to defeat the insurgency, establish a secure environment, extend viable governance, and promote development throughout Afghanistan."[192]

The JCP was not the first attempt to incorporate Afghans into the planning and operational process. An earlier effort to integrate PRT activities with Afghanistan's broader political, military and economic goals was the creation of the PRT Executive Steering Committee (ESC) in December 2004. In January 2009, the General Director of the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) replaced the Afghan Minister of Interior as chair of the ESC in an effort to come in line with the Afghan National

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[190] For an in-depth assessment and analysis (both critical and positive) of PRTs, the author recommends the following reports and articles: Nima Abbaszadeh, et al., *Provincial Reconstruction Teams: Lessons and Recommendations* (Woodrow Wilson School of Public & International Affairs, January 2008); Save the Children, *Provincial Reconstruction Teams and Humanitarian-Military Relations in Afghanistan* (London: Save the Children, 2004); Peter Viggo Jakobsen, *PRTs in Afghanistan: Successful but not Sufficient*, DIIS Report 2005:6 (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2005); McNerney, "Stabilization and Reconstruction in Afghanistan: Are PRTs a Model or a Muddle?"; Carter Malkasian and Gerald Meyerle, *Provincial Reconstruction Teams: How do we Know They Work?* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, March 2009); USAID, *Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: An Interagency Assessment* PN-ADG-252, June 2006; Sebastiaan J. H. Rietjens, "Managing Civil-Military Cooperation: Experience from the Dutch Provincial Reconstruction Team in Afghanistan," *Armed Forces & Society* 34, no. 2 (January 2008); Touko Piiparinen, "A Clash of Mindsets? An Insider's Account of Provincial Reconstruction Teams," *International Peacekeeping* 14, no. 1 (January 2007).

[191] Catherine Dale, *War in Afghanistan: Strategy, Military Operations, and Issues for Congress* (Congressional Research Service: R40156, January 23, 2009), 8.

[192] Ibid., 11.

Development Strategy (ANDS).[193]   The verdict is still out on the ESC's effectiveness since it has lacked any real authority to direct or coordinate PRT operations.[194] Hopefully, this trend will start to change under the current COMISAF, U.S. Army General Stanley McChrystal. The ESC has recently developed a standardized monthly report that all 26 PRTs will provide to the GIRoA.

C.   EVOLUTION OF PRTS

Since late 2002, PRTs have combined civilian and military personnel into a single entity with the purpose of improving security, governance, and economic development. They help bridge the gap between the execution of combat operations by coalition military forces and civilian-led reconstruction and development initiatives. PRTs are an integral part of peacekeeping and stability operations, but they have also been criticized for their "mixed effectiveness, over-emphasis on military objectives and priorities, failure to effectively coordinate and communicate with UN and NGO organizations, and differences in staffing and mission."[195]

The early days of the PRTs are reminiscent of early pacification attempts by the U.S. and GVN in Vietnam: neither were given enough resources or made a serious enough priority to make any sort of widespread or sustainable impact on the battlefield. However, the lack of oversight allowed the PRTs to be flexible and not bound by bureaucratic rules and inertia, which enabled them to tailor their efforts to the needs of their specific AOR. PRTs had a strategic mandate to "monitor, assist and facilitate,"[196] but how they implemented it was left up to the PRT commander on the ground. Komer

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[193] The PRT ESC was originally chartered in December 2004, but met sporadically and after an 18-month hiatus, met again on January 29, 2009. The ESC endorsed a new charter, implementing decisions from the June 2008 Paris Conference where the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS) was approved. The ANDS placed greater emphasis on the role of the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) and the ESC followed suit by replacing the Afghan Minister of Interior with the General Director of the IDLG. http://www.unamagroups.org/kabulprtworkinggroup (accessed August 3, 2009).

[194] Perito, *The U.S. Experience with Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: Lessons Identified*, 2.

[195] Abbaszadeh et al., *Provincial Reconstruction Teams: Lessons and Recommendations*, 5.

[196] McNerney, "Stabilization and Reconstruction in Afghanistan: Are PRTs a Model or a Muddle?," 36.

experienced the same situation with CORDS. Being a new organization gave CORDS the leeway to sometimes make things up as they went along. Unfortunately, PRTs were unable to capitalize on their ability to operate outside of bureaucratic channels like CORDS did in 1967. The ambiguity PRTs went through left them fighting to prove their importance in the broader political-military mission and scrounging for resources and support. Brigade commanders were more concerned about taking the fight to the Taliban and since they controlled the resources, they had other priorities that came before some fuzzy civil affairs program.[197]

The reality is PRTs were not a priority in the early stages of Afghanistan because nation-building activities were not a priority for the Bush Administration. In fact, President Bush actively campaigned against nation-building and he was adamant the U.S. military "should be used to fight and win war."[198] This antipathy in the Bush Administration towards the military being used in nation-building activities created a flawed U.S. strategy before soldiers even stepped foot in Afghanistan. Larry Goodson points out there were very few Afghan specialists within the USG due to America's disengagement from the region after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. Therefore, there were few experts to consult with during operational planning. Even if nation-building activities would have been incorporated into the initial plans, the USG civilian agencies did not have the capacity to meet the requirements. Ultimately, the U.S. entered Afghanistan with a faulty strategy from the start. By not understanding Afghan history, its culture and its people caused the U.S. to make mistakes in the early part of the engagement that we are still recovering from today.[199] An example of this lack of cultural understanding specific to PRTs is they actually started off being called Joint

[197] McNerney, "Stabilization and Reconstruction in Afghanistan: Are PRTs a Model or a Muddle?," 38.

[198] George W. Bush, "Remarks by the President in Roundtable Interview with Foreign Press," Washington, DC, July 17, 2001, http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/07/20010718.html (accessed January 16, 2009).

[199] Larry P. Goodson, "The Lessons of Nation-Building in Afghanistan," in *Nation-Building: Beyond Afghanistan and Iraq*, ed. Francis Fukuyama (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2006), 146–147; Thomas H. Johnson and Chris Mason, "Understanding the Taliban and Insurgency in Afghanistan," *Orbis* (Winter 2007): 88; Havoli, *COIN Revisited: Lessons of the Classical Literature on Counterinsurgency and its Applicability to the Afghan Hybrid Insurgency*, 23.

Regional Teams. President Karzai had to point out, "warlords rule regions; governors rule provinces,"[200] so the name was changed to something that emphasized its reconstruction priority. Another glaring fact that suggests nation-building activities play second fiddle to conventional efforts is only 26 PRTs have been established since late 2002.[201]

PRTs operating in Afghanistan have evolved somewhat in response to their different operating environments, but mainly due to the emphasis placed on them by their owning nation. Three distinctive models stand out:

U.S. model—averages 80 personnel with three to five civilians; led by military commander (there is one civilian director in Panjshir Valley); emphasis on quick impact projects; usually operates in volatile areas.

UK model—averages 100 personnel with 30 civilians; led by civilian; emphasis on local capacity building; ability to operate in volatile area.

German model—averages 400 personnel with 20 civilians; dual-headed leadership of one military and one civilian; emphasis on long-term sustainable development; operates in permissive environment.[202]

Each model has its advantages and disadvantages and determining which model is best is outside the scope of this thesis. The point being made is there are various approaches to PRTs in Afghanistan and the differences are unfortunately not necessarily driven by the operating environment, but rather by restrictions and caveats put in place by the owning nations.[203]

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[200] McNerney, "Stabilization and Reconstruction in Afghanistan: Are PRTs a Model or a Muddle?," 36.

[201] Andrea M. Lopez, "Engaging or Withdrawing, Winning or Losing? The Contradictions of Counterinsurgency Policy in Afghanistan and Iraq," *Third World Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (2007): 246.

[202] Abbaszadeh et al., *Provincial Reconstruction Teams: Lessons and Recommendations*, 5.

[203] Ibid., 7; Touko Piiparinen, "A Clash of Mindsets? An Insider's Account of Provincial Reconstruction Teams," 149; McNerney, "Stabilization and Reconstruction in Afghanistan: Are PRTs a Model or a Muddle?," 40.

D. **CAPACITY-BUILDING** **INITIATIVES** **BY** **THE** **AFGHAN**
GOVERNMENT

The ultimate success of COIN depends on building and securing the legitimacy of the indigenous government at the local level.[204] Programs are needed that build Afghan capacity, not make them dependent upon U.S. and ISAF military personnel, NGOs, or any other form of foreign aid. Komer was adamant CORDS was a Vietnam program, ran by the Vietnamese people with the Americans playing a supporting role. The same has to happen in Afghanistan with the international community playing a strong, but supporting role. The initial groundwork for international support was laid in 2006 with the Afghanistan Compact. It was further solidified during the June 2008 International Conference on Afghanistan held in Paris. More than 80 donors pledged $20 billion USD, aligning themselves with financing and implementing the priorities set out by the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS).[205]

1. Afghanistan National Development Strategy

Verily, never will Allah change the condition of people unless they change it themselves. This verse from the Koran is in the opening pages of the ANDS document. President Karzai touts the ANDS as "an Afghan-owned blueprint for the development of Afghanistan in all spheres of human endeavor" and will help achieve the Afghanistan Compact benchmarks and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).[206] According to the ANDS report:

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[204] Havoli, *COIN Revisited: Lessons of the Classical Literature on Counterinsurgency and its Applicability to the Afghan Hybrid Insurgency*, 34.

[205] Data retrieved from Afghanistan National Development Strategy, http://www.ands.gov.af/ (accessed August 5, 2009).

[206] The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are an agreed set of goals adopted by the international community that promote poverty reduction, education, maternal health, gender equality, and aim at combating child mortality, AIDS and other diseases. The MDGs for Afghanistan have been modified to make them more relevant since they did not sign on to the plan until March 2004 and the rest of the world adopted them in September 2000. Millennium Development Goals: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Country Report (2005): 9.

It is the product of extensive consultations at the national, provincial and local levels. A comprehensive "bottom-up" approach that took into account all aspects of social and economic life and fully reflects the diversity or people in all parts of the country was used in developing the ANDS. Considerable effort was made to ensure that sub-national consultations (i.e., outside of the central government in the capital Kabul) identified the priorities of the Afghan people living in each of the 34 provinces. In addition, a comprehensive series of sector and ministry strategies were developed to address all aspects of social and economic development. The result of this inclusive process is a national strategy that is fully reflective of the aspirations of the Afghan people. The Government is committed to the programs and projects that directly target the poorest and most vulnerable groups for assistance.*[207]*

2. Independent Directorate for Local Governance

Another Afghan-capacity building initiative aimed at making progress at the local level is the Independent Directorate for Local Governance (IDLG) and its Afghanistan Social Outreach Program (ASOP). The IDLG was established in August 2007 and its goal is to achieve stability and security through improved governance at the sub-national level.[208] The IDLG has reached out to community leaders, commanders, and mullahs for help specifically in the area of security. The ASOP goes a step further and uses village and tribal traditions and structures to address local-level needs.[209] Its critics say the IDLG's initiatives have not been well coordinated and there is a gap between the strategic

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[207] Afghanistan National Development Strategy (2008-2013): A Strategy for Security, Governance, Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction, 6.

[208] In 2008, the IDLG brought together provincial Governors, GIRoA ministry officials, senior ISAF officials, UNAMA, and other representatives with forces deployed in those provinces. The initial meetings underscored the linkages among security, governance and development, and helped establish networks. Dale, *War in Afghanistan: Strategy, Military Operations, and Issues for Congress*, 53; NATO Afghanistan Report 2009, 33; Afghan National Development Strategy, 5; National Solidarity Program, http://www.nspafghanistan.org/default.shtm (accessed August 5, 2009).

[209] NATO Afghanistan Report, 24–25.

focus and tactical application.[210] This chapter will later suggest how the PRTs can help close this strategic focus to tactical application gap through supporting the Provincial Strategic Plans (PSP) and Provincial Development Plans (PDPs).[211]

E.   APPLICATION OF LESSONS

The previous chapter listed four macro-level lessons and various related sub-lessons from CORDS that are applicable to Afghanistan. These lessons can be applied without requiring an extensive analysis and detailed comparison of the two conflicts for several reasons. First off, Vietnam was a case of a classic insurgency and while Afghanistan has been referred to as a "hybrid insurgency," there are basic elements of a classical insurgency.[212] Secondly, the parallels between the two wars are clearly there. For example, in both conflicts: 1) conventional forces relied on high-tech weaponry to fight against lighter armed, elusive guerrillas, 2) insurgents perceived the sitting government as corrupt and inept, and 3) insurgents were able to take advantage of a porous border with a neighboring nation while conventional forces had their hands tied due to ROEs. In addition, most importantly, the real struggle in both Vietnam and Afghanistan is over the population.

Of course, there are obvious differences between the Vietnam War and the current campaign in Afghanistan. The scale of effort in itself is greatly different: the Vietnam effort belonged to America compared to the multitude of international actors in Afghanistan. Moreover, Cold War politics drove decisions (rightly or wrongly) during

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[210] Mohammad M. Stanekzai, "Thwarting Afghanistan's Insurgency: A Pragmatic Approach toward Peace and Reconciliation," *United States Institute of Peace*, Special Report 212 (September 2008): 10.

[211] Provincial Strategic Plans (PSPs) are documents developed at the provincial level that sets 3-5 year goals for the province. The goals are tied to objectives set forth in the ANDS and MDGs. Therefore, a PSP is a tool for ensuring provincial targets match up with national targets. Provincial Development Plans (PDPs) document individual projects (i.e., roads and clinics) and prioritize what the Afghans living in the province want the most. PDPs do not set strategy for their province.

[212] Articles that support this argument are: Havoli, *COIN Revisited: Lessons of the Classical Literature on Counterinsurgency and its Applicability to the Afghan Hybrid Insurgency*, 20–23; Robert M. Cassidy, "Back to the Street Without Joy: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Vietnam and Other Small Wars," *Parameters* (Summer 2004): 75–79.

Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s, which is obviously not the case in Afghanistan today. However, there are significant similarities between the two societies as well as similarities between the insurgencies that make lessons from Vietnam applicable.

All that said, the lessons this thesis presents from CORDS are more about streamlining interagency processes rather than recommending an explicit COIN strategy. Robert Komer is clear that if there are any lessons to take from Vietnam, it is that it "teaches the dangers implicit in taking a past experience as an explicit model for the future."[213]   Komer also suggests it is easier to generalize "lessons than to learn much from our Vietnam experience how best to apply them in practice. Indeed, this experience suggests instead the enormous obstacles involved."[214]   This section argues the "enormous obstacles" Komer is referring to is our own bureaucratic inertia. In other words, can flexibility be institutionalized or is that an oxymoron? This thesis proposes there are changes that can be made within ISAF and the PRTs that enhance flexibility, but it will take a paradigm shift from our operating procedures of the past eight years.

The four lessons being applied to Afghanistan from CORDS are:

1.   Unity of effort—Unity of effort is critical for a successful COIN campaign. This includes a coordinated civilian-military approach, clear command and control lines (aka unity of command) and having a set of standard operating procedures.

2.   Right people in the right positions—Leadership matters. However, a great military commander who has been versed in Clausewitzian tactics may not be successful in a COIN campaign. There needs to be a rigorous vetting process and cultural training for all positions.

3.   Ownership has to start at the local level—De-centralize the approach and focus on the specific needs of the individual villages. The locals have to be involved in the process or whatever progress is achieved will not be supported or sustained once the internationals leave.

4.   Sustainable security—The MDG report quote says it best, "development without security is unachievable, and security without development is meaningless."[215]   Above all else, people need to feel safe and secure in their environment.

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[213] Komer, *Bureaucracy at War: U.S. Performance in the Vietnam Conflict*, 165.

[214] Ibid., 167.

[215] Afghanistan MDG Report 2005.

For each lesson, there will be a brief reminder of how it was used effectively for the CORDS program, relate it to the current situation in Afghanistan supported by examples provided from recent commanders of U.S.-led PRTs,[216] and then propose how it could be implemented.

1.   Unity of Effort

Pacification efforts in Vietnam attempted pre-CORDS were never able to make a significant impact on the battlefield for several reasons. One, they were not attempted on a large enough scale, but more than that, they did not have the support of the military. It was not until all facets of the pacification effort were combined under a single-manager and moved under MACV did that start to change.

The DoD always has and always will have the lion's share of the resources. Participants at a workshop on civil-military relations noted, "Congress sees greater political benefit from investing in the military than investing in our foreign affairs agencies and as long as they believe the Department of Defense has significant capacity to execute stability operations," the money will be directed towards the DoD.[217] With the recent publication of FM 3-07, *Stability Operations,* in October 2008, it is safe to assume the money will continue to flow. In order for the civilian agencies to have any meaningful and sustainable effectiveness, it only makes sense to partner up and share assets, resources, equipment and even people. Keeping resources separate causes units to operate inefficiently and sometimes even against each other. In her testimony to the Armed Services Committee, Michelle Parker stated during her time as the USAID representative on the Jalalabad PRT, she never participated in any planning sessions with the battle group who conducted combat operations in her province. The military did not

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[216] The author was able to review After Action Reports (AARs) and transcripts of interviews with outgoing PRT commanders and First Sergeants for eight of the 12 U.S. led PRTs. The interviews and AARs were conducted September through November of 2008. The names of the interviewees are withheld from this thesis.

[217] Frederick Barton and Naom Unger, *Civil-Military Relations, Fostering Development, and Expanding Civilian Capacity: A Workshop Report* (Brookings: Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 2009), 6.

see the USAID as having a "need to know," even though the PRTs would often times provide humanitarian assistance to a village where a combat mission was just conducted.[218]

Unfortunately, Parker's example has been more the rule rather than the exception. However, the lack of coordination and misunderstanding of missions is not just a military-civilian issue. Not understanding the PRT's roles and how and where they fit into the overall mission within the different military services make additional challenges for the PRTs. One PRT commander explained in his AAR the direction they received from their U.S. Army brigade was to kill the insurgents first, then focus on better governance and reconstruction. He tried to explain his mission was reconstruction, but was told all units had to focus on the insurgents. The outgoing PRT commander at Bagram provided another example. His team was responsible for missions in two provinces, but was only manned at the same level of PRTs supporting one province. For five weeks, he was tasked to provide a daily "door checker" at the dining facility (DFAC). He argued with both his Army and Air Force chain of commands that he was not manned to perform this additional duty, but was told every unit had to support the tasking and provide a body.[219] Other commanders said PRTs served as mail clerks, cooks, fuel supply specialists, etc., for the entire FOB.[220] These examples show the complete lack of understanding of the importance of PRTs. PRTs are currently the main COIN force and the fact they are performing door checker and mail clerk duties suppose U.S. military commanders do not get it.

Having an unambiguous chain of command that clearly defined the meaning and differences of ADCON/OPCON/TACON (and not leave it up to the different services to interpret) would undoubtedly solve some of these issues. Ironically, what was initially touted as a strength for the Afghanistan PRTs is now considered an area for

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[218] House Armed Services Committee Testimony of Ms. Michelle Parker, *Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee hearing on The Role of the Department of Defense in Provincial Reconstruction Teams*, 110th Congress, September 5, 2007, 12.

[219] Interview with PRT commander, October 11, 2008.

[220] Ibid.,, September-November 2008.

improvement.[221] According to Robert Perito, the senior program officer in the Center for Post-Conflict Peace and Stability Operations, the "entire multinational PRT program would benefit from an agreed concept of operations and an effective central coordinating authority."[222]

Colonel Lewis G. Irwin provided his perspective on the fragmented processes he experienced while leading Focused District Development, a nationwide effort to reform the Afghan National Police. He also had frustration with the multitude of actors involved in the decision-making process because they:

> often advocate competing visions for Afghanistan's future, and too often they pursue these visions regardless of decisions or agreements to the contrary. With no one player having enough leverage or authority to direct otherwise, this fragmentation leads to incoherence in the collective international redevelopment effort in Afghanistan, resulting in a great deal of wasted effort and generally ineffective results. Not surprisingly, the Afghans often play one international actor off against the other until they find the answer they want.[223]

ISAF needs to establish a clear chain of command so it has control over all the work of the PRTs, both civilian and military elements. Currently, civilians answer directly back to their capitals versus through military channels because they are not part of the ISAF chain of command. CORDS used a "single-manager concept" to coordinate efforts between the military and the civilians. ISAF needs a "single-manager concept" that integrates all elements of the PRT into a unified strategy for Afghanistan. David Galula reinforces the single-manger concept: "More than any other kind of warfare, COIN must respect the principle of a single direction. A single boss must direct the operations from beginning until the end."[224] This would also eliminate duplication of

[221] Ian Westerman, "Pacifying Afghanistan: Enduring Lessons from CORDS in Vietnam," *RUSI Journal* 153, no. 5 (October 2008): 20; Perito, *The U.S. Experience with Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: Lessons Identified,* 13; USAID, *Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: An Interagency Assessment*, 17–18.

[222] Perito, *The U.S. Experience with Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: Lessons Identified,* 1.

[223] Lewis G. Irwin, "Reforming the Afghan National Police: Irregular Warfare Lessons Learned," *JFQ* no. 52 (1st quarter 2009): 73.

[224] Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, 61.

effort, ensure a common set of standards were adhered to and promote a singular vision. Cooperation and ultimately, success, would depend less on personalities and more on SOPs.

Unfortunately, how organizational charts are interpreted in Kabul do not necessarily transition the same way to the rest of Afghanistan. Multiple PRT commanders provided feedback that they did not understand how ISAF fit into their hierarchy, that ISAF direction was not communicated down to the field level, and if there was conflict between the Army brigade guidance and ISAF guidance, the default was to go with the Army guidance.[225]

The military services certainly need to get their act together, but they are not the only organization that needs some housekeeping. Currently, there is a huge capabilities gap in our USG civilian agencies because they have not been able to keep pace with the growth of the DoD. This has caused a major imbalance in the diplomatic tools available to pursue national objectives.[226] For instance, during the Vietnam-era there were approximately 15,000 employees in USAID. Today they have approximately 3,000. The DoS currently has 11,000 employees. A miniscule drop in the bucket compared to the DoD's 2,000,000 uniformed personnel. When you compare budgets, the Pentagon gets almost half a trillion dollars per year compared to the DOS's FY2010 budget request of $16.3 billion.[227] On a positive note, the Congressional Budget Justification request has added a total of 1,181 positions, (700 Foreign Service staff) and upgraded training capacity in the Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, and Urdu languages.[228] However, it will be years before these changes make any real impact.

This capabilities gap filters down to the field where it has serious consequences. Most U.S.-led PRTs have at least three civilian billets and according to the AARs of the previous commanders, there were some rotations where all three billets were unfilled for

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[225] Interviews with PRT commanders, September-November 2008.

[226] Civil-Military Relations, Fostering Development, and Expanding Civilian Capacity, 2.

[227] Which is an increase of $1.885 billion over the FY 2009 estimate of $14.504 billion. U.S. Department of State, Congressional Budget Justification: Fiscal Year 2010, 2.

[228] Of note, Dari and Pashto were not mentioned. Civil-Military Relations, Fostering Development, and Expanding Civilian Capacity, 2.

the entire year. For those that were filled, some were new hires with no prior experience, or they were temporary fills that only served in-country for six months. This was not the case with every civilian. By in large, most PRT commanders spoke favorably of the civilians and the skills they brought to the team and the commanders wished they had more of them. The PRTs that had experienced civilians had too much work for one person to accomplish realistically.[229]

Referring back to David Galula and his classic COIN strategy, "a revolutionary war is 20% military action and 80% political action. Giving the soldier authority over the civilian would thus contradict one of the major characteristics of this type of war. In practice, it would inevitably tend to reverse the relative importance of military versus political action and move the counterinsurgent's warfare closer to a conventional one."[230] Couple this with President Obama's Afghan strategy, which is focused on curbing corruption, creating jobs, and advancing governance and reconciliation in the provinces and districts, it only makes sense for the evolution of stabilization efforts to be civilian-led PRTs. The transition to civilian leadership of all PRTs sends a clear signal to the Afghan government and people that the U.S. military is not a permanent fixture in Afghan society and that improved governance and security will lead to more civilianized forms of assistance. Having civilian-led PRTs would also ensure long-term development would be balanced with near-term military objectives.[231] Canada and the UK have already transitioned their PRTs to civilian leadership and lessons can be learned from their experiences.[232]

ISAF needs to adopt a similar chain-of-command structure like was used in CORDS. Instead of a military commander in charge of the PRTs, put a civilian in charge and give them the responsibility of providing the overall strategic and operational guidance. The senior military officer would serve as the PRT deputy and could supervise the military personnel. To reinforce the chain-of-command concept, civilians would

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[229] Interviews with PRT commanders, September-November 2008.

[230] Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, 63.

[231] Abbaszadeh et al., *Provincial Reconstruction Teams: Lessons and Recommendations*, 16.

[232] Ibid., 22–25, 42–46.

write evaluations on the military personnel they supervised and vice versa. The civilian leader would have access to CERP-type funds and be able to make decisions at their level on smaller, quick impact projects.

At HQ ISAF, there needs to be a small team of both military and civilian advisors that work directly for the top civilian who will serve as COMISAF's deputy for stabilization and reconstruction. ISAF must allow flexibility for PRTs to meet local requirements, but there needs to be consistency across the regions. PRTs need SOPs, but they also must preserve the flexibility to work with the local Afghans to determine what is needed in their particular area. De-centralized execution is the key to success. What is a priority need for a district in Patika province may not be the same for a district in Heart. The local needs should always drive the priorities for the individual PRTs, not direction from ISAF or the national government in Kabul.

- Re-cap of Unit of Effort sub-lessons
    - All PRTs report to ISAF through "single-manager concept"
    - Clearly define ADCON/OPCON/TACON, leaving nothing up to interpretation
    - Civilians lead PRTs
    - Civilian deputy to COMISAF for Stabilization and Reconstruction
    - Civilian deputy has small team at HQ of hand-picked advisors
    - Standardized SOPs with De-centralized execution

2. Right People in the Right Positions

Robert Komer knew the only way for pacification to work in Vietnam was to have the best people with the right attitude and focus. He and his small staff carefully vetted the civilians and did what they could to work the system in order to get the best military officers. All civilian advisors went through 13-weeks of intensive training and those who showed an aptitude for the Vietnamese language stayed longer. Once CORDS personnel were in-country, they attended another class which was usually hosted by Komer himself.

He constantly communicated the pacification message and had no qualms about replacing those who did not meet his standards. Those he liked, he created incentives for them to stay in their positions longer.

Today, forces in Afghanistan are still trying to make-up ground for the operational mistakes and cultural miscues made in the early stages of the invasion. U.S. forces went in with their sights set on Osama and capture-kill missions were the order of the day, re-enforced with massive airstrikes. Houses were bombed, civilians were killed, and as a result, hundreds of new insurgents were created. U.S. Army Lieutenant General Peter Chiarelli stresses that leaders at all levels have to understand how the actions they and their subordinates take impact not only the immediate situation, but the local, national and international audience. Everyone has to do a better job of considering the second- and third-order effects of their decisions.[233]

The initial Afghan strategy was flawed because policy makers did not understand the environment they were preparing to operate in or even much about the enemy for that matter. This is not unlike what happened in Vietnam. Arnold Isaacs wrote, "From start to finish, American leaders remained catastrophically ignorant of Vietnamese history, culture, values, motives and abilities. Misperceiving both its enemy and its ally and imprisoned in the myopic conviction that sheer military force could somehow overcome adverse political circumstances, Washington stumbled from one failure to the next in the continuing delusion that success was always just ahead."[234]

A lack of cultural understanding is our Achilles' heel and it is not just for the Americans. In 2005, Major Andrew Roe of the British Army wrote, "the coalition also suffers from a deficiency of cultural awareness, regional knowledge, and local language skills. Ignorance of tribal customs leads to misunderstandings and alienation. While insurgents communicate freely to gain intelligence, PRT members' inability to speak

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[233] Peter W. Chiarelli, with Stephen M. Smith, "Learning from our Modern Wars: The Imperatives of Preparing for a Dangerous Future," *Military Review* (June 2008): 44.

[234] Arnold Isaacs, *Without Honor, Defeat in Vietnam and Cambodia* (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University, 1983), 489.

tribal languages is a barrier to basic understanding and communication. Language difficulty prevents tactical units from establishing working relationships with village elders and receiving local intelligence."[235]

U.S.-led PRT military team members attend training at Fort Bragg, NC, prior to their deployment. This only started in February 2006, three years after PRTs first stepped foot in Afghanistan. Before 2006, only PRT commanders attended a two-day course before going over. According to the feedback in the AARs, PRT commanders think there is too much emphasis on "shoot-move-communicate" tactics and not nearly enough on how to interact with the Afghans, Afghan history, how they operate, cultural sensitivities and current Afghan events. For example, a PRT commander commented some members of his team had never heard of Ramadan and did not know what it was about.[236] One commander was frustrated the pre-deployment training did not discuss Afghan initiatives such as IDLG or ASOP. In fact, he was told all he needed to know about governance in Afghanistan he learned in his third grade civics class.[237] Also, 100% of the commanders said their teams needed more emphasis on COIN and language training. A few commanders took the initiative to use a program like Rosetta Stone to learn phrases in Pashto or Dari prior to their arrival, but they were the exception.[238]

Continuity and length of deployments were also listed as a problem by the outgoing commanders. For a 12-month deployment, only nine months are spent with boots on the ground due to pre-deployment training requirements. PRT commanders did not think this was near enough time in-country. It takes so much time to familiarize oneself with the subtleties of their AOR, learn who the formal and informal leaders are, much less establish any sort of relationship with them, get educated on the current projects and make contacts, by the time they felt comfortable in their jobs, it was time to

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[235] Andrew M. Row, "To Create a Stable Afghanistan: Provisional Reconstruction Teams, Good Governance, and a Splash of History," *Military Review* 85, no. 6 (November/December 2005): 24.

[236] Interview with PRT commander, October 7, 2008.

[237] Ibid., November 19, 2008.

[238] Interview with PRT commanders, September–November 2008.

go back home. The commanders all thought they could have wasted less time on their initial arrival if they would have had access to information specific to their province ahead of time.[239]

Continuity would be better served if the PRT core staff rotated individually instead of as a whole new team. PRTs also need extended tour lengths. Actually, several commanders commented on this in their AARs.[240] One commander mentioned the local leaders know the PRT members are only going to be there for nine months, which is a relatively short time. If they do not get the answer they want from the current team, they will wait several months for the new team to arrive and then ask again.[241] The Afghans have time to wait; the PRT teams do not. The savvy Afghans know this and continue to exploit it. By staggering core staff deployments, PRTs could stop re-inventing the wheel with each new team rotation.

The core staff members for the PRTs, both civilian and military, need to be carefully vetted to ensure they have the right background, previous experiences, and attitude for these challenging positions. Ideally, all PRT members should be screened at some level to make sure they have the right mind-set and focus. Regardless of who is going to be in charge (military or civilians), they have to be the best and the brightest. Leading PRTs should be viewed as a coveted assignment and there needs to be a rigorous selection process. For civilian leaders, they should have prior leadership experience and exposure to working with the military. PRTs represent the "tip of the spear" in a COIN and are the backbone for success in Afghanistan. PRTs have to be manned with the best people because the future of Afghanistan depends on it.

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[239] After reviewing the AARs, it became obvious that how long it took a PRT commander to get comfortable with his AOR is a direct reflection of how well the previous commander did on their turnover. One PRT commander commented that he was not aware of the IDLG and the 254 Community Development Councils operating in his province. This information should have first been covered in the pre-deployment training and if not, than definitely during turnover with the previous commander.

[240] Interviews with PRT commander, September–November 2008.

[241] Interview with PRT commander, September 23, 2008.

General Rupert Smith of the British Army sums it up well with:

We must develop the confidence to grant authority to those we send to conduct these complex operations commensurate with the responsibilities laid on their shoulders. Not the least of these responsibilities is the expectation on the political level that they will simply get on with things on the ground, regardless of their suitability to the job, the relevance of the mandate, or their lack of knowledge of the other forces with whom they are to collaborate, in the case of coalitions and multinational deployments. This confidence will come only with the selection and training of the right people, and achieving this on a multinational basis will be difficult to do and will take time. It will also come only when the political and diplomatic level gain a better understanding of the uses and utility of force before seeking to use it. Nevertheless, until this is achieved we will not gain the full potential of the deployed forces and resources.[242]

- Re-cap of Right People sub-lessons

    - Less training on conventional tactics and more COIN-specific methods (i.e., Afghan culture, history, realities on the ground)

    - Language training has to be considered critical training for core members of a PRT

    - Staggering rotations of PRT core members would increase continuity

    - Lengthen PRT tours to 15-18 months vs. 12 months

    - Vigorous selection process for PRT leaders

3.   **Ownership has to Start at the Local Level**

CORDS built viable and responsible political institutions at the local level. It prioritized what was important to the peasant farmers: land reform, rural development, and anticorruption measures. Above all else, Komer stressed it happened with the Vietnamese in the lead and at the lowest level possible--the village.

T. E. Lawrence gave sage advice to British officers working with local Arabs in 1917. "We have to be prepared to see them doing things by methods quite unlike our own, and less well: but on principle, it is better they half-do it than that we do it perfectly

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[242] Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (NY: Vintage Books, 2005), 414.

for them."[243] In Afghanistan, the same parable rings true. In addition, since all Afghan politics are tribal, it just makes sense for a localized COIN strategy.[244] At its most simplified level, it really boils down to this: ask the local people what they need, determine the formal and informal leaders, and then help them work towards their objectives. The overall process should always be centered around training the Afghan people to do their job.[245]

PRTs were intended to work themselves out of a job, but their current model minimizes this possibility. PRTs continue to use international and Afghan contractors to carry out reconstruction projects, and although Afghan government offices are involved, the projects are managed and executed by international PRT staff. As a result, the Afghan government's capacity to manage projects and resources at the sub-national level remains low. Making Afghans partners in PRTs is the best way to prepare for Afghan management of resources and the sustainability of critical development capabilities.

The only way to successfully perform "clear-hold-build" operations and really partner with local Afghans is to have a continued presence in the districts and villages. The State Department's Chris Mason and Naval Postgraduate School's Thomas Johnson have made the case for changing strategy to focus on the district level for several years.[246] There is a current proposal from ISAF for the creation of District Support Teams (DSTs) to augment PRTs in Afghanistan. DSTs would operate in the same capacity as the PRTs, only down at the district level. DST members would live among the local people, work with them on a daily basis, and establish a level of trust and confidence that is needed to truly get things accomplished. This would be a huge step towards making some real, sustainable progress in Afghanistan.

No doubt, there are challenges to living among the Afghan population. It is much more rural and dispersed, the vast majority of Afghanistan lacks basic infrastructure, and

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[243] Michael Clark, foreword to *T. E. Lawrence in War and Peace: An Anthology of the Military Writings of Lawrence of Arabia*, ed. Malcolm Brown (London: Greenhill Books, 2005), 15.

[244] Johnson and Mason, "All Counterinsurgency is Local."

[245] Dale, *War in Afghanistan: Strategy, Military Operations, and Issues for Congress*, 72.

[246] Johnson and Mason, "All Counterinsurgency is Local"; Matthew B. Stannard, "Applying Iraq's Broader Lessons in Afghanistan," *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 24, 2009, A-3.

many Afghans live in remote, isolated, and barely accessible valleys. There is some concern that in areas that have been in complete isolation for years, the local population is generally hostile to all outsiders, whether friendly or otherwise. Any outsider trying to live and work in these remote areas could create new hostilities.[247]

AAR feedback from the PRT commanders is consistent that there has to be more Afghan involvement in their processes. One commander explained how he took a risk and placed an Afghan in charge of a local contracting process that had historically been U.S.-led. He received much criticism at first for his decision and was told repeatedly it would not work. However, it ended up being recognized as a "best practice" and under consideration by UNAMA for implementation across Afghanistan.[248] This example proves that Afghans, with the proper support, can handle the responsibilities if we have people willing to take risks and put them in charge of areas that are normally led by internationals. Another commander opined with support from a strong Provincial governor, the PRTs can work hand-in-hand with local Afghans using the ANDS, PSPs and PDPs as guidelines to develop a strategy specific for each province that rebuilds Afghanistan from the district up.[249]

The major idea for implementation is to form joint Afghan-PRTs/DSTs, with Afghans in the lead. These teams would then identify and help meet the specific needs of local populations. To help re-build the Afghan government's credibility and prove they can support and protect all the people of Afghanistan, the PRTs/DSTs need to continue supporting the PSPs and the PDPs, ensuring projects contribute to targets set by the ANDS and the MDGs. That way, it puts an Afghan face up front—an "Afghanization" of the effort—and the ISAF partners are in a supporting, behind the scenes role, just like it was with CORDS. Moreover, the final step in the eventual transition to civilian leadership of U.S.-led PRTs should be the plan for the transfer of all PRT resources to the Afghans. This would finally complete the cycle and undoubtedly prove the Afghans are in charge of their own country and destiny.

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[247] Dale, *War in Afghanistan: Strategy, Military Operations, and Issues for Congress*, 28.

[248] Interview with PRT commander, October 11, 2008.

[249] Ibid., October 7, 2008.

Another lesson from CORDS is getting rid of government officials who are corrupt or inept. In order for the international community to retain any credibility, it cannot continue to tolerate or support corrupt Afghan officials. Efforts must be taken to remove these officials from their positions at all levels of the government. This sends a strong signal to the Afghan people that the international community is serious about good governance, transparency and legitimacy.

Bottom line, for there to be sustainable progress in Afghanistan, the Afghan people need to become equal partners and share the responsibility of implementation. To do this, they have to either be a part of the decision-making process or more preferably, own the process. After all, they are the main stakeholders in this entire effort. What they think and want matters.

- Re-cap of Ownership at Local Level sub-lessons
  - Implementation of local-level DSTs working in-conjunction with PRTs
  - Afghans take lead whenever possible—"Afghanization" of efforts
  - Use ANDS, PSPs, and PDPs as guidelines, not as a mandate
  - Get rid of corrupt and inept government officials

4. Sustainable Security

Another key feature of the CORDS program was its emphasis on sustained security (local clear and hold) as the indispensible first stage of pacification. CORDS utilized the local police and paramilitary forces to provide sustained protection to the rural population versus the military's "search and destroy" operations, which were targeted on larger enemy units. CORDS viewed the under-utilized, paramilitary RF and PF as the logical force on which to build. They were all locally recruited and most were volunteers. They were lightly armed, meaning they were cheap to support, and already organized in small territorial units. RF served only in their own provinces and PF in their own districts. Primary responsibility for security of the local and rural populations devolved upon local forces recruited from the population itself. CORDS put the onus for securing the local environment back on the local population.

Security is essential to legitimate governance and participation, effective rule of law, and sustained economic development. The absence of security in any environment diminishes the trust and confidence of the population in its government, prevents meaningful reconstruction, and makes everyone vulnerable to insurgent activities. The COIN field manual specifically directs U.S. forces to make securing the civilian, rather than destroying the enemy, their top priority. One PRT commander captured this dilemma in his AAR, stating the National Guard units who normally provided the security forces elements for the PRTs had to be reminded their goal was to protect the civilians, not shoot the insurgents.[250]

In COIN operations, the primary frontline force is often the police.[251] Unfortunately, Afghanistan's national police force needs more than reform …it needs a complete overhaul. Lewis Irwin writes about the challenges he faced during his year working on the nationwide effort to reform the Afghan police. Irwin saw first-hand how corruption is entrenched in and an accepted part of the Afghan culture. For instance, theft committed to feed one's family is considered acceptable. "Any effort at professionalizing the police would have to take place within a context of abject poverty, wide-spread illiteracy, a thriving and well-connected drug trade, porous borders, and an almost total absence of the basic elements of rule of law, ranging from criminal investigators to lawyers, prosecutors, judges, and jails."[252]

The author's personal contacts with the ANP are much the same. From May to October 2006 during meetings with local ANP at checkpoints in a twenty-mile radius around Bagram AB, police officers lacked equipment, ammunition, basic training, uniform items such as boots (some ANP officers were wearing plastic sandals with their uniforms) and complained of going several months with no pay. The ANP at more isolated checkpoints were regularly found sleeping or high on hashish. It was not all

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[250] Interview with PRT commander, October 7, 2008.

[251] United States Department of the Army, *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, 229.

[252] Irwin, "Reforming the Afghan National Police: Irregular Warfare Lessons Learned," 72.

negative encounters, though. There were some professional ANP officers who were very proud to be a part of the police force, but they said it would be hard to continue in their current position without regular pay.

The solution for sustainable security in Afghanistan has to start with a bottom-up strategy. Just how CORDS used a localized effort for village security, create a small, localized security force that consists of men from the area villages, formed into a mobile unit that is willing to fight at a moment's notice, but cheap to maintain a concept not unlike the minutemen of the American Revolution. Here is also where an Afghan specific disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) program can have a significant impact. Provide the right incentives for low-level insurgents to re-integrate into civilian life, complete with training and a paid position to help protect their village. The force would have to be different from the now defunct Afghan National Auxiliary Police program that was created in 2006 and provided ten days of training and $70 a month to anyone who owned a gun.[253] It is important to find a way to fill the security gap, but not create more security problems by taking short-cuts. CORDS placed regional and local paramilitary groups under province and district chiefs. The local Afghan militia forces could fall under control of the district chiefs and in even more remote areas, the village elders.

The common theme between this section and the previous one is it all starts at the local level and the DST concept is their way ahead. International police and military trainers/mentors should be embedded with the DSTs and would have a significant role, working with the ANA and ANP, and overseeing the local and regional forces as well. It is crucial the mentors and trainers are not imposing Western models on ANSF personnel, or training Afghans in the mirror-image of the service they belong to. The Afghans need training relevant for their operating environment. The ANSF has to take the lead for local security with the international police and military trainers/mentors working side-by-side with them, 24/7. Once security is steady and reliable in every district, Afghans can stop surviving and start living.

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[253] Dale, *War in Afghanistan: Strategy, Military Operations, and Issues for Congress*, 47–48.

Thinking outside the proverbial box of Western security, in tandem with implementing the DSTs, policy makers need to consider what role the village elders and the traditional tribal codes and structures will play in the Pashtun tribal areas.[254] The term "ungoverned spaces" is often used to describe regions within a country where the rule of law is weak.[255] Pashtun tribal areas are often label "ungoverned" by outsiders. However, as Professor Johnson argues, this is by no means the case. The absence of Western structures of governance has allowed "complex and sophisticated conflict-resolution mechanisms, legal codes, and alternative forms of governance" to develop.[256] If the DSTs reach out to the village elders, promoting their importance as on the same level as the mullahs and the government officials, and initially allow the traditional *jirga* system to handle low-level disputes, we will take one step closer to the ultimate goal in a COIN struggle: the population.

- Re-cap of Security sub-lessons
  - Security is the lynchpin for any future development
  - Develop a local/regional force to augment the ANP and ANA
  - Embed military and police trainers/mentors with the DSTs
  - NSFs have to be lead on security at the local levels
  - Afghan tribal systems and structures have to play a role

F.   SUMMARY

Although the scale and historical circumstances of Vietnam differ from Afghanistan, the interagency cooperation and coordination efforts in Vietnam hold critical lessons. The lessons CORDS provides has nothing to do with how to fight a conventional war, but more how to defeat an insurgency through proper organizational structure. Just like in Vietnam, the agencies in Afghanistan responsible for political and economic development need the armed forces to protect them from insurgents in the

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[254] Thomas H. Barfield, "Culture and Custom in Nation-Building," *Maine Law Review* 60, no. 2 (2008): 354–359.

[255] McNerney, "Stabilization and Reconstruction in Afghanistan," 34.

[256] Johnson and Mason, "No Sign until the Burst of Fire: Understanding the Pakistan-Afghanistan Frontier," 46–47.

areas they are trying to work. Colby described the problem in Vietnam prior to CORDS: "You'd find the U.S. civilians resettling villagers in one place, while the military was putting a defense force in a different place where there weren't any villagers. It didn't make any sense. You needed to have the defense force, the self-defense force, the elections, the tin and cement to build houses, and the propaganda support as one program for a village."[257] Unity of effort is critical to success!

In Afghanistan, ISAF has to use its limited resources in the most efficient and effective way possible. By adopting a single-manager concept, ISAF would ensure the international community is speaking with one voice through its COIN strategy to the Afghan people.

Strong processes and consistent SOPs are one thing, but having the right people in the PRT jobs ensures they are carried our correctly. We also have to do a better job at understanding the local terrain, the Afghan people, and their various and distinct backgrounds. David Kilcullen writes:

> There is no substitute for understanding this cultural terrain: we cannot defeat the insurgency unless we understand what drives it. But we must be keenly aware of the limits of our ability to "play" in this tribal game. Rather than meddling ourselves, we must use our knowledge to build, support and enable trusted Afghan partners whose grasp of these dynamics is instinctive. We must seek a form of indirect influence through trusted intermediaries, rather than applying too direct an approach. This may seem a neo-colonialist approach, until it is remembered that while colonialism was exploitative and was intended to be permanent, this is a temporary expedient only and is a means to deliver Afghans the assistance promised by the international community, only until such time as they can handle their own problems without such assistance.[258]

For a COIN to be successful, there has to be an explicit strategy for winning the trust and confidence of the local population. The only way to do this is by providing them security they can rely on and transferring ownership of programs to the lowest level possible. Currently, operations in Afghanistan are managed at the provincial level. Only

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[257] Moyar, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey: The CIA's Secret Campaign to Destroy the Viet Cong*, 48.

[258] David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 114.

operations that are de-centralized and pushed down to the local level (i.e., district and village) will create an environment for steady and sustainable security, meaningful work with the local populace, and prohibit the insurgents to operate.

Two key reforms that could effectively build Afghan government capacity at the local level and incentivize officials to take reform seriously are increasing Afghan government involvement in PRT/DST activities and transitioning to civilian leadership of PRTs/DSTs. As the provincial and district authorities demonstrate capacity to manage resources, PRTs/DSTs can begin to allocate resources to provincial/district governments for reconstruction projects. These two initiatives will ensure the sustainability of critical development capabilities in the Afghan government. Over time, as security conditions permit, the military personnel in PRTs/DSTs will withdraw, and Afghan and international civilians will assume responsibility for directing development assistance to the Afghan local authorities. Eventually, all of these capabilities should transfer to the local government.

V.   CONCLUSION

Now more than ever, the international community must find a way to protect the Afghan population while increasing the legitimacy of the Afghan government. Undoubtedly, Afghanistan presents its own unique set of circumstances and challenges, but this thesis makes the case that there are lessons from CORDS that can maximize our efforts in the realm of COIN and stability operations through unity of effort, finding and keeping the right people, pushing ownership down to the local level, and sustainable security. Sustainable security is arguably the most important lesson of all because without security, there cannot be meaningful development.

Just like in Vietnam, a conventional military strategy is not the solution for Afghanistan. CORDS unified the various pacification efforts in Vietnam, bringing them under a single manager and finally making them a priority for the military commanders. In Afghanistan, the PRTs are experiencing the same command and control difficulties the myriad of pacification efforts did pre-CORDS. Despite the lack of any unified, strategic guidance, military units are finding ways to be successful at the local level. These individual units are waging an ad hoc war, coming up with innovative ideas and ingenious ways to stabilize their local area of responsibility. Unfortunately, this will not be enough for us to win the larger war in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan needs a common, over-arching strategy for COIN and stability operations. This will provide an integrated, coordinated theory for victory at the strategic level. Meanwhile, the tactical and operational units need the flexibility to tailor the implementation of the strategy so it meets the specific needs of their local area. The end goal should always result in the Afghan people assuming responsibility for their own development and security. For any of our efforts to succeed in the long term, they have to be sustainable by the local population.

The previous chapter offered recommendations on how to apply the lessons of CORDS to Afghanistan. Specifically with the creation of the District Support Teams, the focus has to be concentrated at the local level and use a bottom-up approach. The following three policy recommendations enhance the proposals made in the previous chapter.

A.   POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1.   Locals First

Afghans have to view this struggle as their own, not as belonging to the international community. At every opportunity, Afghans have to be in the lead. With this, the Afghan government has to ensure it is able to hire and retain its country's best minds by providing the right incentives. Another idea is employ a type of Civilian Conservation Corps or Works Progress Administration across Afghanistan. This would get people back to work, provide them much needed skills training, and give them a sense of pride and ownership by allowing them to work on projects that they and their families will benefit from. The only concern is to ensure wages and benefits for these types of programs are commensurate with jobs of equal value in the Afghan economy.

2.   Education for All Afghans

Education is a fundamental cornerstone for peace and stability, democracy, good governance, poverty reduction and economic growth.[259] The future of Afghanistan depends on educating both its young boys and girls. By educating females, women and girls obtain the ability and skills to effectively contribute to the well-being of their families and participate in their local community. In societies like Afghanistan where women are responsible for the management of their household and for food preparation, their health and awareness of hygiene, nutrition, and basic health and first aid practices directly impacts not only their own well-being, but also that of the children and men in

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[259] Islamic Republic of Afghanistan: Ministry of Education, "National Education Strategic Plan for Afghanistan: 1385–1389," Ministry of Education, http://www.moe.gov.af/strategic_plans.htm (accessed December 13, 2008).

their families.[260]   Due to their role in the family, women are critical conduits of information about basic health care and teach new values to their children.[261] Education is by no means a quick fix, but rather a long-term goal and an investment in Afghanistan's future. It will offer new opportunities for future generations of Afghans.

3.   Metrics

The U.S. and ISAF have to first define success, and then find a way to measure it. We cannot continue to measure progress by using self-assessments and highlighting what we know we are already good at doing. There has to be a balance between objectivity and subjectivity. A practical system should contain elements of both. Also, an individual's performance report should not be based on these progress reports alone. As long as this is the case, field commanders will continue to inflate numbers and only report on the positive changes in their AOR, glossing over trouble spots, which is where the focus really needs to be. Another option to consider is an unbiased, independent third party to serve as a watchdog for dishonest reporting.[262]

B.   AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY

This thesis, like most others, has probably raised more issues than it has answered. The following areas are important factors for Afghanistan that were not explored in the thesis.

1.   Focus on Agriculture

In Afghanistan, 80% of the population live in rural areas and rely on subsistence farming. Helping them grow more food will improve the quality of their lives. Richard Holbrooke has said previous campaigns that focused on eradicating poppy crops were a

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[260] Cheryl Benard et al., *Women and Nation-Building* (Santa Monica: RAND Center for Middle East Public Policy, 2008), 52.

[261] Cheryl Benard et al., ed. *Afghanistan: State and Society, Great Power Politics, and the Way Ahead: Findings from an International Conference, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2007* (Santa Monica: RAND Center for Middle East Public Policy, 2008), 50.

[262] Craig Cohen, "Measuring Progress in Stabilization and Reconstruction," *United States Institute of Peace* (March 2006): 11.

waste of money and "a benefit to the enemy. We were recruiting Taliban with our tax dollars."[263] By helping Afghans improve food production, it will reverse a sense of hopelessness that contributed to the Taliban recruitment. Holbrooke continued with, "They need the kind of soup-to-nuts agriculture support that Roosevelt gave farmers during the Great Depression—roads, markets, irrigation, seeds, fertilizer, educational materials. Afghans are smart farmers, they just need the right kind of help from us."[264] Farming programs can also help revive the economy by growing what other nations want to import: pomegranates, almonds, pistachios, raisins, and fruits such as apricots that can be dried or turned into juice.[265] The Agribusiness Development Teams manned by state-based Army National Guard units need to be expanded.[266]

2. Regional Approach

Afghanistan's security is ultimately linked to its regional partners.[267] Therefore, in order for Afghanistan to stabilize, it will take a concerted effort from its neighbors, specifically Pakistan. The swath of land around the ill-defined Durand Line, especially to the East, has to be monitored and controlled. Since the eastern area is sovereign territory of Pakistan, it is imperative this space is not allowed to continue as a safe haven for extremist groups. Richard Holbrooke and General David Petraeus both agree the Central Asian states, India, Iran, China, and Russia all need to be factored into the regional approach to securing Afghanistan.[268] The overriding need is for a common purpose, clear direction and agreed upon goals. Success can eventually be achieved only if the Afghan people, their neighbors, and the international community take ownership and responsibility of the problem.

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[263] "U.S. Pursues a New Way to Rebuild in Afghanistan," *The Washington Post,* June 19, 2009, A1.

[264] Ibid.

[265] Ibid.

[266] Dale, *War in Afghanistan: Strategy, Military Operations, and Issues for Congress*, 57.

[267] Kenneth Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy* (Congressional Research Service: RL30588, February 9, 2009), 43–50.

[268] David Petraeus, Interview, *Foreign Policy* (January/February 2009), http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=4587 (accessed August 31, 2009).

These two areas are specific to Afghanistan, but the third suggestion would affect future nation-building efforts. Preparing our military and civilian agencies for nation-building is a daunting task that requires a delicate balance of skills. Lieutenant General Peter W. Chiarelli states:

> To meet the national security challenges of the future, we must create the capacity to engage in the full range of military and interagency operations, and must embrace the concept of nation-building, not just rhetorically, but entirely. The potential to lose the momentum of change in this emerging reality of conflict through the diffusion of funding, political positioning that takes a short-term view, and the natural reluctance of our forces to intellectually engage beyond the linear construct of warfare is real. Additionally, while we attempt to improve our capabilities in non-linear warfare, we must maintain our ability to defeat conventional military threats and deter the emergence of near-peer competitors. The challenge is to find the right balance without trying to attain competence in so many potential missions that we can't do any of them well.[269]

3.   Participate in UN Peacekeeping Missions

Since the 1993 Blackhawk down debacle in Somalia, the United States has chosen to send a sparse number of troops to support UN peacekeeping and peace enforcement missions.[270] The U.S. has decided instead to bare the monetary burden[271] rather than risking U.S. service member lives in corners of the world that do not have any significant relevance to U.S. national interests. However, UN peacekeeping missions do a variety of tasks that U.S. forces are routinely called upon to perform, but usually in a more permissive environment. For instance, UN peacekeepers are involved in conflict mediation, setting up and running DDR programs, monitoring elections, rebuilding national police forces, and working with a multitude of civilian agencies. These are very complex operations that require a diversity of skills. U.S. forces would get the chance to manage everything from political and diplomatic efforts, humanitarian missions,

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[269] Chiarelli with Stephen M. Smith, "Learning from our Modern Wars: The Imperatives of Preparing for a Dangerous Future," 37–38.

[270] For a current ranking of UN troop donations, check http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/contributors/index.shtml (accessed August 31, 2009).

[271] The U.S. funds 26% of the UN peacekeeping missions. Fact Sheet for UN Peacekeeping, http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/overview.shtml (accessed August 31, 2009).

intelligence gathering on the local conditions, and economic development all while maintaining the proper security conditions. U.S. forces routinely find themselves doing these types of tasks for the first time in a combat environment. If they participated in UN peacekeeping missions, they could get hands-on experience in nation-building activities for the first time in a more permissive environment. Moreover, U.S. forces would be able to work side-by-side with individuals (both military and civilian) who have done these types of activities before.

C.   SUMMARY

The mission in Afghanistan needs a clear direction and goals, with open and honest information flow to the Afghan people. The ultimate objective is to empower the Afghan people in order to strengthen their governance and fight extremism and corruption on their own terms.

We need our best and brightest focusing on ways to stabilize and build Afghanistan from the bottom-up and more importantly, getting the Afghan people involved. This thesis proposes we do not have to start from scratch. CORDS was a successful COIN and stability operations program in our past that we can implement fundamental ideas from before we are too far gone in Afghanistan. As the George Santayana adage goes: "Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it." One Vietnam in our history is enough. It is time we learn from it.

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